

# *The* CRUISE *of the* ENTERPRISE

By  
JAMES OTIS

















# The Cruise of the Enterprise



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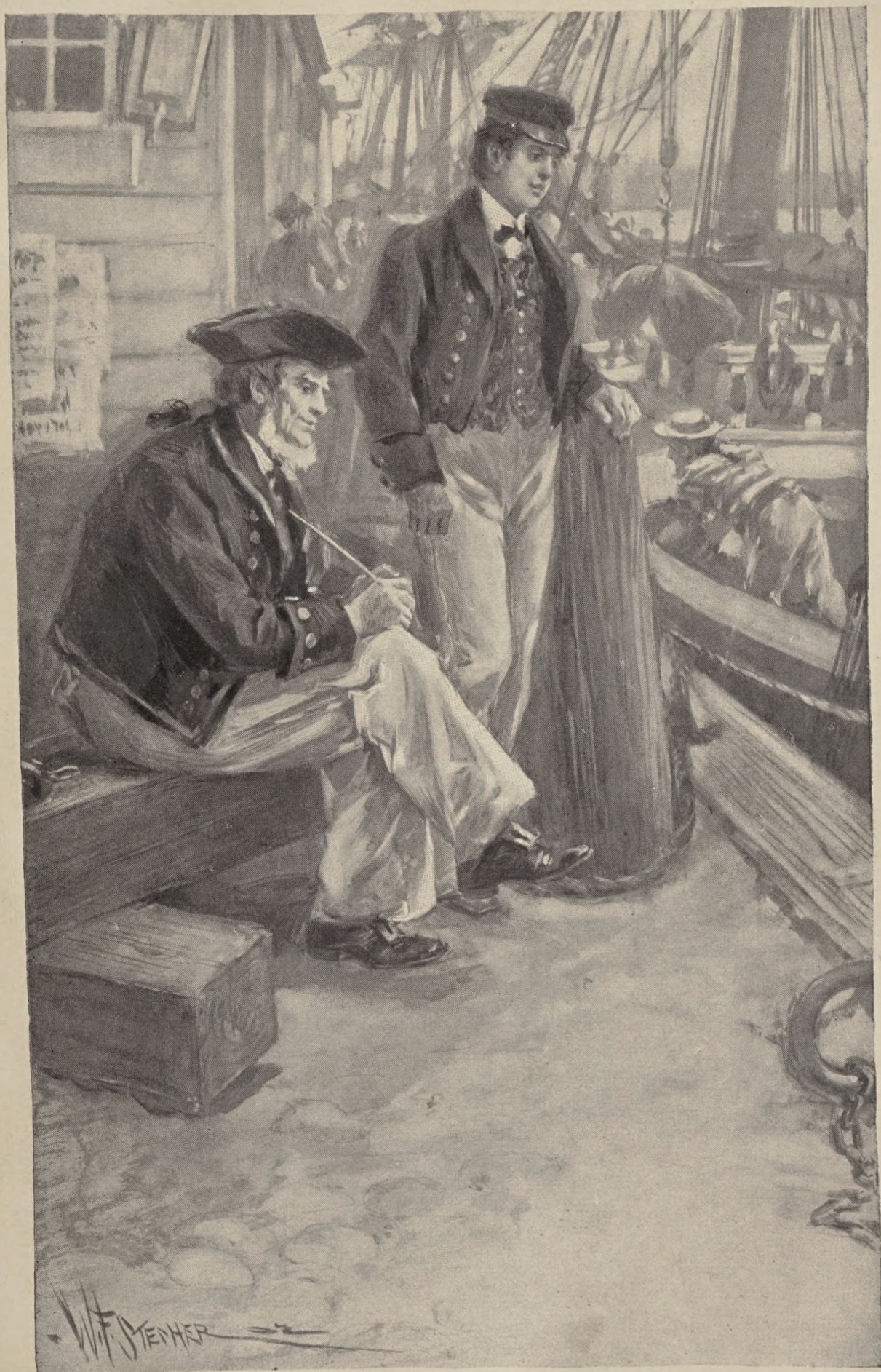
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"SHE LOOKS SMALL, I'LL ADMIT."



# The Cruise of the Enterprise

BEING

*A Story of the Struggle and Defeat of the  
French Privateering Expeditions against  
the United States in 1779*

BY

JAMES OTIS

*Kaler.*

*Illustrated by William F. Stecher*

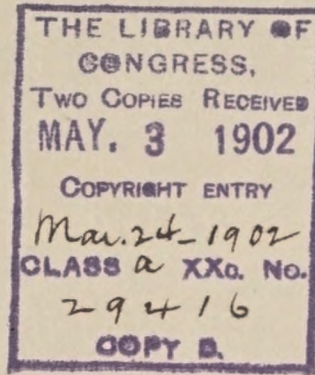


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THE CRUISE OF THE ENTERPRISE

WASSEL JET  
CORONADO TO



## Preface

"IT would exceed the limits of this work to enter into the history of that system of gradual encroachments on the rights of the American people, which distinguished the measures of both of the two great belligerents in the war that succeeded the French Revolution; or the height of audacity to which the cruisers of France, in particular, carried their depredations, most probably mistaking the amount of the influence of their own country, over the great body of the American nation. Not only did they capture British ships within our waters, but they actually took the same liberties with Americans also.

"All attempts to obtain redress of the French government failed, and unable to submit any longer to such injustice, the government, in April, 1798, recommended to Congress a plan of armament and defence. . . . Twenty small vessels were advised to be built, and, in the event of an open rupture, it was recommended to Congress to authorize the President to cause six ships of the line to be constructed. This force was in addition to the six frigates authorized by the law of 1794.



“ . . . On the 4th of May (1798) a new appropriation was made for the construction of galleys and other small vessels, and on the 28th of the same month the President was empowered to instruct the commanders of the public vessels to capture and send into port all French cruisers, whether public or private, that might be found on the coast, having committed, or which there was reason to suppose might commit, any depredations on the commerce of the country ; and to recapture any American vessel that might have already fallen into their hands. . . .

“ It will be seen that an express declaration of war was avoided in all these measures, nor was it resorted to at all throughout this controversy, although war, in fact, existed from the moment the first American cruisers appeared on the ocean.

“ The nature of the warfare, which was now (1799) confined principally to chases and conflicts with small, fast-sailing privateers, soon satisfied the government that, to carry on the service to advantage, it required a species of vessel different from the heavy, short sloop of twenty or twenty-four guns, of which so many were used in the beginning of the contest.

“ Two schooners had been built with this view. One of these vessels was called the *Experiment* and the other the *Enterprise*, and they were rated at twelve guns.” — COOPER'S *Naval History of the United States*.



## Note

THE story of this famous cruise, when a tiny schooner sailing from the United States engaged and vanquished vessels twice or thrice her size and weight, was written down by Paul Burton, a lad who, at the age of fifteen, had shipped on board the *Enterprise* as "boy," and fifteen years later set himself the task of writing a detailed account of his voyage when so much of glory and prize money was won.

His manuscript has suffered no change at the hands of the editor, who is so egotistical as to claim equal authorship with Paul, save to the extent of rendering his nautical terms and expressions into such language as may be understood by a landsman, and by toning down here and there expressions which are the stronger for being given in less emphatic words.

In fact, this story belongs by right to Paul Burton, and, in justice to the lad who served his country well, it is given very nearly as he wrote it almost an hundred years ago.

JAMES OTIS.







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# THE CRUISE OF THE ENTERPRISE

## CHAPTER I

### JETHRO'S ARGUMENTS

THERE is no reason why I should set down here anything whatsoever concerning the trim little schooner *Enterprise*, built on the same lines as the *Experiment*, for the very good reason that every American must by this time hold her in his heart for the darling she has proved herself to be over and over again.

I do not believe the day will ever come when the lads of the United States have forgotten what she did, and how it happened that so small a craft was numbered among the naval vessels of 1800; for surely a schooner of only one hundred and sixty-five tons *is* a small craft to venture out on the ocean simply for the purpose of fighting.

The wise heads of Salem predicted that the officers of the navy department would rue the day they



planned such a cockle-shell with the idea that she would be of service against the Frenchmen, who so far disregarded our rights as to chase their enemies into American waters regardless of all maritime law. The time had come when we of America proposed to show the frog-eaters that we knew what was our due, and would uphold it with our last gasp; but whether the little schooner could do anything by way of teaching the "Parleyvous," as old Jethro Leighton called the Frenchmen, was a matter which caused a great difference of opinion among those in our town who were supposed to be well informed in such matters.

But whether the wise men of Salem approved of fitting out such small craft, or not, there she was with the riggers on board making ready for sea, and I stood by the side of old Jethro Leighton, looking at her with wistful eyes.

My father had promised that I might ship as a sailor at any time and on any craft after my fifteenth birthday; and mother, not without many a tear and sigh, had agreed that she would make no protest.

On this first day of December, in the year of grace 1799, I had passed my fifteenth birthday by more than three months, and yet remained at home as if fast tied to my mother's apron-string. The reason for it every



one knows; even the youngest lad in these United States remembers how we were insulted again and again by the French cruisers, and those who have lived on the seacoast must yet bear in mind that our merchantmen were forced to remain in port, or take great chances of being gobbled up by the frog-eaters.

Therefore it was I had been unable to ship for a long voyage, as was my desire, and I would not turn fisherman because I counted on being more than a common sailor after I had learned the ropes. Another reason why I yet remained at home when I should have been jockeying a spar, was that old Jethro Leighton, the ablest seaman sailing out of Salem, had agreed to take me under his wing, and every one knows that old Jethro would not sign articles for anything except a cruise which promised good returns.

"We'll look over whatsoever turns up in our line, and make no bloomin' mistake in either craft or captain," the old man had said time and time again to check my impatience. "You've got your whole life before you, an' a few days more or less on shore don't signify. Ship with an able master, in a well built, well-found craft, an' you'll soon be the proper sailor; but make a wrong move at the beginnin', an' your chances for gettin' ahead in the world will be slim."



Because of what the French were doing, there were but few vessels leaving Salem in those days, and Jethro had seen nothing to suit him until the day when the *Enterprise* was being fitted out.

He had soothed me by declaring that within a year the Parleyvous would have had a lesson that could not easily be forgotten, and then business in Salem would revive, after which we might take our pick of ships.

Then came the day when he proposed that I go with him to look at the schooner which the people in Congress believed would be able to work some mischief among the French cruisers, and we inspected her as carefully as if it was our purpose to buy the little beauty.

"Yes, she's well built, an' should be able to show the frog-eaters her heels when she can't stand up against 'em," old Jethro said as, our inspection at an end, he seated himself on a stick of timber while filling his pipe. "She looks small, I'll admit; but if the right man handles her, you'll hear that she ain't to be sneezed at."

"Father said Lieutenant Shaw was to be given command of her," I interrupted eagerly, rejoicing at being able to give the old sailor a bit of news, whereat Jethro pricked up his ears mightily.



"Do you mean John Shaw, whose father served under Commodore Hopkins in the War of Independence?"

"His name is John, but more than that I can't say."

"If he comes from the family I'm thinkin' about, that bit of a schooner will make a great cruise," Jethro said reflectively, after having lighted his pipe.

"Is he a brave man?" I asked, rather for the purpose of persuading the old sailor into spinning a yarn, than from a desire for information.

"The Shaws I've known were born fightin', an' as for handlin' a square-rigged craft, their equals ain't to be found."

"Well?" I asked, as he paused without any apparent intention of telling a story.

"Well, that's all there is to it, except, perhaps," he added slowly, "if this John is the son of Samuel, I wouldn't mind shippin' on board the *Enterprise* for the first cruise."

I looked at the old man, believing for the moment that he had taken leave of his senses.

"Would you go in for fighting?" I cried.

"I reckon it would amount to that if I shipped on yonder schooner."



“But you’ve agreed to take me for a shipmate, Jethro Leighton!”

“Well, what’s to hinder your followin’ me aboard the *Enterprise*, if it so chances that this John Shaw is the son of Samuel?” the old man asked quietly.

It was for the moment as if I had suddenly been plunged head foremost into cold water. I wanted to be a sailor; but as for learning the trade on board a war vessel, — why it was almost ridiculous. I was no blood-thirsty pirate who could stand up to kill or be killed, and I questioned whether I should find courage enough to help work the guns when the enemy was the weaker, to say nothing about tackling a vessel of equal or greater strength.

“Well?” Jethro repeated, eying me narrowly.

“I — I — I don’t believe I could do it.”

“What?” the old seaman roared. “Do you mean to give me the idea, that you, Paul Burton, son of him who commanded the smartest privateer out of this ’ere port no longer ago than ’80, would be afraid to sign articles for a cruise in the *Enterprise*?”

I was ashamed to declare boldly that I had grave doubts as to my own courage, and Jethro said musingly : —

“I reckon we might get along on board the



schooner right snug, with a fair show of findin' a good bit of prize money. It'll be tight stowin' forward, even if she carries no more'n seventy-five as a crew; but that ain't the worst that can happen to a man."

I understood by this last remark that the old sailor was thinking of the living accommodations; and this, even more than anything he had said, caused me to believe he was seriously contemplating signing articles for the first cruise of the *Enterprise*.

Such a possibility both surprised and frightened me. I had counted on learning a sailorman's duties by the side of Jethro Leighton, knowing full well that with such a friend as I knew he could be, I might push ahead twice as rapidly as would be possible if I went among strangers.

"It surely can't be that you would ship to fight the Frenchmen," I said after a long pause, and hoping it might yet be within my power to bring about a change in the plans, for by this time I knew full well that his mind was made up to the venture.

"Why can't it be?" he asked gruffly. "Are you thinkin' that because I'm an old shell-back I don't dare strike a blow against the bloomin' frog-eaters who are tryin' to find out jest how much in the way of rough treatment Yankees will stand?"



"Of course I don't think you are a coward, Master Jethro," I replied quickly, and then came all which was in my mind.

I told him why I did not dare to ship aboard the *Enterprise*; explained that I was in fact a coward, and wound up by declaring that my heart would indeed be broken if he went to sea without me.

"That's exactly what I don't count on doin', lad. We'll be mess-mates for one cruise, if no more, an' you shall have your first dose of sailerin' on board the *Enterprise*."

He must have understood by the expression on my face how much of fear was in my heart, for he cried sharply :—

"What would your father say if he could see you jest now, when your face is drawn down till it's no more'n a white thread?"

"I don't care to think of that, Master Jethro. Of course he would be angry—"

"Angry! He'd be ashamed, an' wouldn't want to show his face in Salem afterward. Now listen to me, lad, an' remember what I say. 'Cordin' to my way of thinkin', you ain't half the coward you've made out. You've got the idee that every shot what comes aboard finds its billet; but once you're in an action,



an' learn that a good deal of iron can be thrown away on both sides without doin' any great damage, you'll sing a different tune. Now we two are goin' to ship aboard the *Enterprise*, an' if you try to squeak out of it, I'll go straight to Captain Burton when next he makes port, tellin' him what I've heard an' seen this day."

A threat like that was sufficient to reduce me to silence. If he had demanded that I lay my hand on red-hot iron, I would have done it immediately rather than have it said to my father that I was in fact a coward.

Jethro evidently understood all which was in my mind, for he said quietly, and as if the business had been decided upon beyond recall:—

"Now is as good a time as any, an' perhaps better for them who are weak-kneed. Lieutenant John Shaw, who has been put in command of the schooner, is lookin' after old shell-backs like me; he counts on havin' a crew of able seamen, with no greenhorns among 'em. I'll agree to sign articles if you're taken on as boy, an' the thing is done. You'll be gettin' a berth which ain't to be had for the askin', by a long shot; an' it's enough to make you proud as a peacock."



There was no such thought as pride in my mind; I was terrified by the bare idea of shipping to fight battles, and if my heart was so full of terror with thinking of the possibilities, what would be the result when I found myself forced to take part in a naval engagement?

Of a verity, I would speedily be rated among all who knew me as a veritable coward.

Jethro had me in his power, because of the threat to tell my father that I was afraid to ship on board the schooner; and what made the situation worse for me, he knew this quite as well as if I had said so outright. Therefore he went about the business of joining the crew of the *Enterprise* at once, dragging me with him.

Lieutenant Shaw was to be found on board, as I well knew; and within five minutes after Jethro had decided upon his line of conduct, we were standing before him.

I had expected to see a red-faced, ferocious-looking man, who used oaths as another would adjectives, armed to the teeth, and proudly refusing to hold converse with such as Jethro and me.

To my surprise, however, I was before a pleasant-faced man not more than thirty years of age, who



spoke as kindly to Jethro and me as if we had been friends of long standing. There was nothing of the bully or the pirate about him, and with his first words much of the fear which had assailed me fled.

"Yes, I want a crew of able seamen," he said, in reply to Jethro's question. "We cannot carry more than eighty men at the most, and it is necessary every one should be able to do full duty. I have heard of you, Leighton, and been hoping you would take advantage of an opportunity by which you should be able to tassel your handkerchief well with prize money."

"Well, sir, I'm ready to ship this blessed minute, if it so be you take on Paul as boy; he's the son of Captain Sam Burton, who sailed out of here in '80 with the smartest privateer afloat, an' I'm allowin' he'll soon be able to bear a hand with the best of us."

The lieutenant eyed me sharply, and my heart beat fast and furiously with joy, for it appeared to me that he was on the point of refusing Jethro's proposition.

"I had decided not to ship more than one as boy, because the schooner is so small; but Captain Samuel Burton's son, if he has any of his father's spirit, should be different from the ordinary run of lads."



If I had but dared, the lieutenant would soon have been told that in the way of courage I was entirely the opposite of my father. In fact, the words were almost trembling on my lips, when Jethro replied stoutly:—

“I’ll answer for him, sir, an’ the more heartily, seein’s how it has been agreed all along that I am the one to lick him into shape. He’ll do his full duty, an’ a liddle more, or my name ain’t Jethro Leighton, which it is.”

This was a cold-blooded promise, which alarmed me more than I had been reassured by the lieutenant’s appearance, and my knees literally trembled beneath me. It was much like a sentence of imprisonment when Lieutenant Shaw replied, as if doing some great favor, instead of making arrangements to have me killed, perhaps:—

“I will take your word for it, Leighton, and expect you to look after the lad. Have his parents given him permission to ship?”

“It has been understood for some time, sir, that I was to take him with me, an’ there’ll be no question about it.”

Then the papers were brought out for us to sign, much as though this United States schooner *Enter-*



*prise* was no more than an ordinary trader; and I did not dare open my mouth against anything Jethro Leighton had agreed to, although I set it down in my mind that if I should be killed, he must be counted as my murderer.

Well, we signed our names in due form, my fingers trembling so violently that I could hardly hold a pen, and swore to do this or the other, all of which meant that we agreed to stand up and be shot at as often as Lieutenant Shaw saw fit to put us face to face with the enemy.

This done, the old sailor led me out of the cabin to the shore, for it was understood that we would not be called upon for service until the schooner was nearly ready for sea, and when we were come to the head of the dock, he said solemnly:—

“Paul Burton, I’ve reg’larly saved you from bein’ a fool, an’ before three months are gone you’ll thank me for it,—that is, if we’re both alive.”

“Now you’ve hit it exactly!” I cried petulantly. “We shan’t be alive three months from now, and the chances are we haven’t got as many weeks left us. If the Frenchmen run across us the day after we leave port, that’s the end of it!”

“Oh, it is, eh? Why, lad, you come nearer bein’



an idjut than I thought possible ! So you believe that all hands are to be killed in the first action ? How many times has your father been under fire ? ”

“ I don’t know ; but he has been in a good many fights. ”

“ Right you are, an’ yet here you’re figgerin’ on bein’ killed the first pop. If we two were at sea, I’d dress you down handsomely with the rope’s end, thinkin’ to beat some sense into you ; but seein’s how we’re ashore, I feel obleeged to leave you in your foolishness, with the hope that you’ll come ’round in time. ”

Then the old man turned to leave me, and I cried : —

“ Don’t you count on coming home to tell mother what I’ve done ? ”

“ I allow you can do that part of it without any help from me. Take my advice, though, an’ don’t let her know that you’re scared nearly out of your wits, for the wife of Sam Burton won’t look overly well pleased at knowin’ that her only son is afraid of his own shadder ! ”

My anger was great as I walked slowly homeward, after old Jethro left me, with the sting of his words rankling in my heart. I promised myself that I



would have nothing whatever to do with him when we were on board the *Enterprise*; I would refuse to mess with him, and if he attempted to force his companionship upon me, so much the worse for him.

To sum up the situation in a few words, I thought and acted childishly — foolishly; but, fortunately, it so chanced that the old sailor never knew I was so idiotic as to be enraged simply because he was making a man of me even against my own will.

I went home determined to make light of that which troubled me so sorely, while talking with my mother; and because of this resolve, I treated it quite as a matter of course that I should have shipped on the *Enterprise*.

My mother, dear soul, made no remonstrance against my sailing on a vessel belonging to the navy, although I could see that she was somewhat startled because of my having made such a choice.

“It is for you to decide, my son,” she said, when I had come to an end of my short story, for I made it appear as if I willingly entered the service. “Since you are to become a seaman, perhaps it is better you should ship on a government vessel rather than a merchantman.”

I failed to understand why she should look at



the matter so calmly, when to me it was little better than walking deliberately toward death.

It disappointed me because she did not cry out vehemently against her son's thus venturing into danger; and, perhaps, way down in one corner of my heart, I hoped she would be so thoroughly opposed to the idea of my sailing on a man-of-war as to force Lieutenant Shaw into removing my name from the ship's articles.

Why she believed it better to ship on the *Enterprise* instead of a merchantman perplexed me, and I took a roundabout course to learn the cause by saying:—

“I was afraid you might think that I had no business to go where it stands to reason I shall be forced to fight for my life.”

“In these days, Paul, the crew of a trading vessel is often pressed into service, as you know full well. Think of your being seized by a British press-gang, and forced to spend three or four years on one of the king's ships! Even though you escaped that danger, I am quite certain your chances for getting into trouble are less while you are on a man-of-war, than if you sailed with a crew of wild fellows who are ready to plunge into all sorts of dissipation at every port.”



"But one stands face to face with death in a battle, mother," I continued, disappointed because I could not arouse her fears for my safety.

"A sailor is always in danger, Paul. Your father took part in many engagements, and why should you not be as fortunate as he?"

Then she told me that it would please my father, when he came into port again, to know I was on board the *Enterprise*, with Jethro Leighton to look after me, and declared that he had often hoped I would want to enter the navy.

She told me of this engagement or that in which my father had taken part; spoke of the fear constantly in her heart that now, while he was in the merchant service, his vessel would be captured, and repeated again and again that she was more free from anxiety when he sailed in command of a privateer.

All this was news to me, but it served to hearten me wonderfully; and before the evening was come to an end, I began to think that perhaps Jethro Leighton had done me a good turn.

In order to believe this, however, it was necessary for me to keep from my mind the possibilities of what might come in the future, in case Lieutenant Shaw



took it into his head to attack a vessel stronger in men and metal than the *Enterprise*.

Then mother began to plan as to the outfit I would need; and when I went to bed that night, there was more courage in my heart than I had known since Jethro first made known his intention of sailing in the schooner.

Mother had said very much about the chances of distinguishing myself to such an extent that in time I would become a commissioned officer in the navy, when my future would be assured, and contrasted such a position with that of a captain or mate in the merchant service, until I almost persuaded myself that I might come back from this first cruise a lieutenant, or a midshipman at the very least.

Before sleep came to my eyelids I was considering the glory and honor to be gained, rather than the danger to which I should be exposed; and then I forgot my anger against Jethro Leighton until once more he seemed to be my very good friend, who had put me in the right path to make a name for myself.



## CHAPTER II

### ON BOARD

[T is not probable that any person outside the circle of my most intimate friends will ever see these pages ; yet no one can speak with certainty regarding the future, therefore I propose to set down here that which would seem very odd to one who was not familiar with all the circumstances.

Although as a matter of fact the United States was at war with France, so far as the killing of men and the capture of vessels was concerned, there had been no declaration of hostilities between the nations. When the diplomats of the two countries met, all was peace and harmony — on the surface, at least. When the French and Yankee seamen met, the big guns boomed, blood was shed, and lives were destroyed.

A curious state of affairs, was it not? As early as the 28th of May, in the year 1798, the President, finding it impossible to get any satisfaction for the outrages of which Yankee seamen were the victims, instructed the “commanders of the public vessels to capture and



send into port all French cruisers, whether public or private, that might be found on the coast, having committed, or which there was reason to suppose might commit, any depredations on the commerce of the country; and to recapture any American vessel that might have fallen into their hands."

Here is a copy of a portion of an article which appeared in the *New England Gazette* in August, 1798. I have saved it because it explains the situation, over which I have heard old shell-backs argue by the hour without arriving at any conclusion satisfactory to themselves, or those who may have been listening to their tongue-wagging:—

"Until May of this year the old treaty of alliance formed between France and the United States during the war of the Revolution, and some subsequent conventions, were legally in existence; but Congress by law solemnly abrogated them all, on the 7th of July, on the plea that they had been repeatedly disregarded by France, and that the latter country continued, in the face of the most solemn remonstrances, to uphold a system of predatory warfare on the commerce of the United States.

"It will be seen that an express declaration of war is avoided in all these measures, although war, in



fact, existed from the moment the first American cruisers appeared on the ocean. On the 9th of July another law was passed, authorizing the American vessels of war to capture French cruisers wherever they might be found, and empowering the President to issue commissions to private armed vessels, conveying to them the same rights as regarded captures, as had been given to the public ships."

In June of 1798 Captain Decatur of the *Delaware*, took the French privateer schooner, *Le Croyable*, which vessel was refitted by our government under the name of *Retaliation*, and put in command of Lieutenant Bainbridge. That was the first prize of this odd war.

Now the United States was to try conclusions with the enemy with such vessels as the *Enterprise*, and I, Paul Burton, was a member of her crew—if indeed you can rate a ship's "boy" as belonging to the fighting force, more especially one who had never sailed a dozen miles outside of Salem harbor.

Of the time spent in making ready for sea I do not propose to write, save in so far as to say that each day I grew more proud because of having signed the schooner's articles, and gradually forgot,



in a certain degree, the fears which had at first beset me.

My acquaintances in Salem were one and all jealous of my good fortune, as they called it, in being allowed to sail aboard the schooner, when many and many a better lad had been refused the privilege.

I really began to look upon Jethro Leighton as an exceedingly kind friend who had forced me to do that which was best; and if the truth must be told, gave myself many airs on the strength of belonging to the little vessel which was to work so much havoc among the enemy's shipping.

My mother — God bless her! — gave me such an outfitting as never another lad could boast of, and if her heart was heavy because of my coming departure, she never allowed so much as a sigh to escape her lips, at least when I was near at hand.

Before we had been ordered on board it was said that the *Enterprise* would be sent to the Windward Island station, where all believed French cruisers might be found in plenty; and thanks to the predictions of old Jethro, I began to count my portion of the prize money before leaving home.

I have observed that whenever a lad tells of his



first experience at sea, he always makes a long story of the sickness which assailed him immediately after leaving port, and oftentimes gives long, dry accounts of his outfit, as if such things were of great importance to a stranger.

Now I do not propose to make any such mistake; but shall content myself by saying that on the 19th of December, 1799, the *Enterprise* left Salem, and among the eighty-one souls aboard, Miles Partlett and myself were the only useless members of the crew.

Miles was a lad from Boston, whose father had considerable influence with those gentlemen who made up the Congress, and because of such connection Miles had been shipped on the same rating as myself. He was in his sixteenth year, quite as green as was I; but firm in the belief that during the first engagement he would so distinguish himself, that our commander could do no less than promote him immediately the enemy's vessel struck her colors.

Of our outward voyage I do not care, nor am I able of my own knowledge, to say very much.

Old Jethro may have believed that he did me great service as nurse during that time when it seemed certain I would speedily die from the terrible sick-



ness which assailed me; but I can set it down positively that he treated me more like a brute than a human being, for he laughed when my distress was greatest, and persisted in declaring that my plight was absolutely necessary if I ever counted on becoming a sailor.

Miles was in quite as dangerous a condition as myself, and while we swung in our hammocks between-decks, side by side, we gave each to the other last messages for the loved ones at home, in case one of us survived.

Then came the day when we could crawl on deck and eat our full share of food, after which our illness was much like an ugly dream.

From this time forth we were forced to do a certain share of the work, and take our full part in the ship's drill, which was held each day. Lieutenant Shaw was a veritable glutton, so far as concerned discipline, and during an hour and a half each forenoon and afternoon all hands of us went through the drill, doing exactly as we would in action.

Thanks to such rehearsals, I finally knew exactly where to go, what to do, and how I should behave when the crew were ordered to quarters, brought out by the fire alarm, or boarders were called away.



During all the time I served under Lieutenant Shaw, we had more or less of a drill every day, except when the weather was too heavy, and I have no hesitation in saying that the best disciplined crew in the service could be found on board the little schooner *Enterprise*.

We spoke no sail, so far as I know, from the time of leaving Salem, until quite by chance we fell in with the *Constellation*, a 38-gun ship flying Commodore Truxtun's flag.

This officer was in command of the station to which we had been ordered, and when Lieutenant Shaw went on board the ship to receive orders, our people believed we would speedily be sent in search of the enemy.

When our commander returned, after having spent an hour or more with the commodore, we learned that the *Enterprise* was ordered back to Philadelphia with despatches concerning the bloody action between the *Constellation* and *La Vengeance*, a French frigate mounting fifty-two guns.

As a matter of course, the crew of our boat, which carried Commander Shaw to the commodore's ship, learned from the men of the *Constellation* the full particulars of the action; and although this story of



mine is supposed to be devoted to the movements of the *Enterprise*, I cannot resist the temptation to tell here what the Yankee sailors did when they met an enemy who, by weight of metal and force of men, should have made a prize of the Yankee ship in short order.

Here is the yarn as I have seen it written out by an officer who took part in that day's work, therefore no one can question its truthfulness. In fact, old Jethro declares that the half of what our men did has not been told; but regarding that I leave others to judge, contenting myself with giving the story as it was set down:—

“On the 1st of February, 1800, the *Constellation*, 38, Commodore Truxtun, was again off the island of Guadaloupe alone, Basseterre bearing east five leagues, when a sail was seen to the southeast, steering westward. Commodore Truxtun at first supposed the ship in sight to be a large English merchantman from Martinico, of which he had some knowledge, and unwilling to be drawn to leeward of his cruising ground, he hoisted English colors by way of inducing her to run down and speak him.

“This invitation being disregarded, sail was made in chase, the *Constellation* gaining fast on the



stranger. As the latter drew nearer, the ship to the windward was discovered to be a French vessel of war, when the English colors were hauled down, and the *Constellation* cleared for action.

“The chase was now distinctly made out to be a heavy frigate mounting fifty-two men. As her metal was in all probability equal to her rate, the only circumstance to equalize this disparity against the *Constellation* was the fact that the stranger was very deep, which was accounted for by a practice of sending valuable articles to France, at that time, in ships of war as the safest means of transmission.

“Commodore Truxtun was not discouraged by his discovery, but continued to carry every stitch of canvas that would draw. Toward noon, however, the wind became light, and the enemy had the advantage in sailing.

“In this manner, with variable breezes and a smooth sea, the chase continued until noon on the 2d, when the wind freshened, and the *Constellation* again drew ahead. By the middle of the afternoon the wind had every appearance of standing, and the chase was rising fast.

“It was eight in the evening, nevertheless, before the two ships were within speaking distance of each



other, the stranger having come up to the wind a little, and the *Constellation* doubling on her weather quarter.

“Commodore Truxtun was about to speak to the enemy, when the latter opened a fire from his stern and quarter guns. In a few moments the *Constellation*, having drawn still more on the weather quarter of the chase, poured in a broadside, and the action began in earnest.

“It was a little past eight when the firing commenced, and it was maintained with vigor until near one in the morning, the two ships, most of the time, running free, side by side, when the stranger hauled up and drew out of the contest.

“Orders were given on board the *Constellation* to brace up in chase; but at this moment a report was brought to Commodore Truxtun that the mainmast was supported almost solely by the wood, every shroud having been shot away, and many of them so repeatedly cut as to render the use of stoppers impossible.

“Aware of his danger, Commodore Truxtun ordered the men from the guns to secure this all-important mast, with the hope of getting alongside of his enemy again; and, judging by the feebleness of her resistance



for the last hour, with the certainty of taking her, could this object be effected.

“But no exertion could obviate the calamity, the mast coming by the board within a few minutes after the enemy had sheered off. All the topmen, including Mr. Jarvis, the midshipman in command aloft, went over the side with the spars, and that gallant young officer, who had refused to abandon his post, with all but one man, was lost.

“The *Constellation* was no longer in a situation to resume the action, and her enemy was in a far worse condition, with the exception that she still retained spars enough to enable her to escape. Finding it impossible to reach any friendly port to windward, as soon as the wreck was clear of his ship, Commodore Truxtun bore up for Jamaica, where he arrived in safety.

“In this close and hard-fought action the *Constellation* had fourteen men killed and twenty-five wounded, eleven of the latter dying of their injuries. Her antagonist arrived at Curacoa dismasted, and in a sinking condition; she reported having had fifty of her people killed and one hundred and ten wounded. The *Constellation* carried twenty-eight 18's and ten 24-pound carronades; her crew numbered three hun-



dred and ten. The *La Vengeance* had twenty-eight 18's, sixteen 12's, and eight 42-pound carronades, with a crew of between four and five hundred."

It was the report of a gallant action which we of the *Enterprise* were to carry into Philadelphia, for there was no question but that the *Constellation* had engaged with a superior force, and would have brought the Frenchman in as a prize but for the loss of her mast.

Our people cheered again and again, pluming themselves on this action as if they had taken part in it, and while I was puffed up with pride for what the Yankees had done, there was a heaviness in my heart which would not lighten as I realized what a sea-fight might mean.

Forty of the *Constellation's* men had been killed or wounded during the engagement, and I could not refrain from figuring out what would be our percentage if we engaged in a similar action.

It was all very well for Jethro Leighton to say that my father had been in many battles and always come off without a scratch; I could not believe that his son would be so fortunate.

The old cowardice began to overpower me, while Miles declared that he would like nothing better than to take part in just such a fight.



However, I was not so much disturbed as I might have been, because of the fact that we were ordered to Philadelphia with Commodore Truxtun's despatches, therefore I had little reason to quake with fear until the *Enterprise* should be back at the station again.

When the little schooner was stretching away for home once more, leaving behind those brave fellows who had covered themselves with glory, the old barnacles on our gun-deck set up such a buzzing that one might have thought we had a dozen or more swarms of bees on board.

Every man jack of them — and Miles took part in the conversation whenever he was permitted to do so — discussed again and again the news we were carrying to Philadelphia; and if Commodore Truxtun could have heard these shell-backs explaining just how his mainmast could have been treated to prevent its going by the board, he might have come to believe that he knew very little about seamanship as compared with those old fellows from nearabout Salem and Boston.

Jethro Leighton told Miles and me again and again just what he would have done under similar circumstances, and we dare not so much as laugh at his vaporings, for he was a handy man with a rope's



end, and did not hesitate to lay it with vigor on the backs of us two lads if it so chanced that he felt in the humor.

Miles was constantly deploring the fact that there were but two boys on board the *Enterprise*. If there had been a dozen, so he argued, our condition would have been much improved, because there would be just so many more for the men to vent their spite on, whereas we two were the only scapegoats for all our crew of eighty.

If we had been kicked and cuffed around because of mischief done, or some duty neglected by us, I could have borne the punishment better; but as it was, if a sailor chanced to be dressed down by an officer, he immediately came below and soothed his ruffled spirits by flogging or pounding us lads until he was tired. If any old shell-back was out of humor, he livened himself by knocking us about as if we had shipped for no other purpose than to provide pleasure for him, and when the watch below gathered to hear some one of their number spin wonderful yarns, Miles and I were kept in the background, where no more than half the story could be heard.

However, it is not my purpose to give way to



grumbling with my pen; I had determined not to speak of it; but even now I can feel the tingling caused by a rope's end skilfully applied, and the words were set down almost before I realized what was being written.

Two days after parting company with the victorious *Constellation*, we sighted a brig to leeward, and, running down to speak her, had the satisfaction of learning that she was an American prize to a French cruiser.

As a matter of course the prize crew made no resistance when Lieutenant Shaw ordered her to heave to and send a boat alongside. The frog-eaters took the matter quite calmly, and in an hour after she was brought to, the Frenchmen were below as prisoners, while the released crew of the brig headed her for a home port, blessing the little *Enterprise* for having turned the tables for them so neatly.

One other Yankee vessel we recaptured without firing a gun, before we made the capes of the Delaware, and I was beginning to grow brave once more, for we had already done good work without seeing very much of danger.

It is necessary, however, that I hurry over that portion of our cruise during which we had little or



no excitement, and come to the time when we worked independently, so to speak.

The *Enterprise* was not allowed to remain in port many hours. As soon as the despatches were delivered, and we had taken on water and fresh provisions, we got under way for the windward station once more, spending no less than four days working down the Delaware River with contrary winds.

During the first week in March the schooner was off Cape François, and never a sign of the enemy had been seen, when the lookout reported, just at sunset, a large frigate to windward bearing down upon us.

Now Miles Partlett had made many boasts as to what our crew could and would do, when we sighted one of the enemy's vessels. To hear him, a stranger would have said that his greatest desire was to see the *Enterprise* running down to engage a French frigate, for then, as he declared, must come the time when our commander would have an opportunity to learn of what stuff he, Partlett, was made.

He and I were on deck when the word was passed aft that a frigate was standing down upon us, and we heard old Jethro say grimly:—

“If it so chances that yonder stranger is an enemy,



we can count that the little *Enterprise* is mighty near the end of her cruise, an' we're like to find out how a French prison looks."

"Can't we run away from her?" Miles asked, and I fancied that his voice trembled slightly.

It was natural that a coward like myself should be frightened at such a time; but I was astonished to hear such a fire-eater as Miles speak of running away.

"When a schooner can show her heels to a frigate with the wind we've got now, you may count on butterin' parsnips with fine words an' be able to taste the grease," Jethro said with a laugh, as if he saw something very comical in such a disagreeable situation. "We'll have to take what comes; an' if we do find ourselves under the guns of a 58 frigate, I hope our commander will let us take one shot at her before haulin' down our colors."

It is a fact that Miles grew pale, and so great was my surprise at seeing him show signs of fear that for the moment I forgot entirely that I was the coward.

When Jethro ceased speaking I turned my head aft, where three or four officers were standing watching the stranger with their glasses, and on looking around once more, I missed Miles.



"What has become of the lad?" I asked, and old Jethro said with a peculiar chuckle: —

"He sneaked down below. I reckon he's gone to put his war-paint on before advisin' our commander to engage the frigate, if it so be she's an enemy."

A moment later word was passed forward by those who had been standing near the quarter, that our officers recognized the stranger as a Yankee ship, the *Constitution*, which carried Commodore Talbot's broad pennant. She belonged to the St. Domingo station, and had most likely been led off her ground by a chase.

It was only natural that all hands should remain on deck to watch the gallant frigate as she came down upon us in fine style, and thus it chanced, most likely, that no word was passed below as to what had been discovered.

At all events, Miles did not show himself until we had hove to a mile or more to leeward of the frigate, and Lieutenant Shaw was on his way to report the news from home.

Then my comrade made his appearance, looking just a bit sheepish at first; but trying to bluster in his old ferocious fashion.

"So we won't have any fight after all!" he cried,



as if most grievously disappointed. "I counted on our showing what the *Enterprise* could do."

"An' you was allowin' to begin the engagement below, eh?" one of our watch asked with a leer.

Miles turned his back upon the man, saying to me in a whisper:—

"I don't reckon on going into a fight without making some preparations, and it took me quite a spell to overhaul my dunnage."

Now I knew full well that Master Partlett's belongings were packed in a bag no larger than my own; and he could have turned out everything he owned twenty times over during the two hours or more he had remained below.

I began to have grave suspicions as to his courage, and could not resist the temptation of saying:—

"If there had really been a fight on hand, we might have been sunk twice over while you remained below. If you count on showing what you are capable of doing, it would be a good idea to have your dunnage where it can be come at more conveniently."

Miles looked at me questioningly, growing quite red in the face meanwhile, but made no reply; and



when Lieutenant Shaw came on board once more, we were so excited by the news he brought that I gave no further heed to the valiant lad.

Commodore Truxtun, to whom we were to report, had sailed for home, so our commander learned; and there was nothing left for us to do but bear up for St. Kitts, where the windward squadron had been ordered to rendezvous.

This news gave our old shell-backs the greatest satisfaction, much to my bewilderment; and at the first opportunity I asked Jethro Leighton the cause of the rejoicing.

"It's owin' to the fact that from this out we're likely to begin our proper work, lad; an' because of it, every man jack should throw up his cap. So far we've been no more'n a despatch boat, an' except we had the rarest kind of good luck, couldn't count on givin' an account of ourselves. I ain't what you might call a fire-eater, like your messmate Miles; but I'd feel bad if we didn't get a chance to show what we can do. Now has come our time, however, an' I'm way off my reckonin' if Lieutenant Shaw don't let us spread ourselves. He's no fresh-water sailor; an' with the commodore out of the way, the *Enterprise* will poke her nose into the course of many a



French cruiser. Two months or more at sea without havin' done anything is a mighty poor showin'."

"We've recaptured two prizes," I ventured to suggest; and the old seaman looked at me scornfully.

"What does that amount to? Here we are, eighty men or more, with a trim, well-found schooner under us, an' nothin' to show but the heavin'-to of prize crews what never counted on fightin'. Mark my words, lad, the dance will begin from this day out; an' we'll soon have a chance to show whether we're of the stuff which brings in enough to pay its way."

Every man jack of the crew seemed to feel much as did Jethro, and even on the faces of the officers one could see evidences of the most complete satisfaction.

Not until the *Enterprise* had finally parted company with the frigate did I go below, feeling anything rather than pleased with the prospect before us; for, as I have said so many times, the mere mention of an engagement sent my heart into my boots at one bound.

As seemed only reasonable, the watch below were wagging their tongues over the change in the situation; and although there were as many opinions as there were men regarding the course which we ought



to steer, all hands appeared positive that we would soon have an opportunity of measuring strength with the Frenchmen.

Miles lounged from one group of sailors to another, striving to hear what every one thought of our chances, until he came to understand, as I already did, that we were on the eve, perhaps, of an action.

Then the lad came forward to where I was sitting with my back against a bulkhead timber.

"It begins to look like business, eh?" he said, with what he evidently intended should be a smile, but which was in fact a most ghastly grin.

"All hands believe we're like to have our work cut out for us, now the schooner is free-footed, so to speak," I said, watching him narrowly, determined to learn whether his fine words had been used to hide a heart even more cowardly than mine, if, indeed, that could be possible.

"It hasn't seemed to me that our commander is a terrible fire-eater," he said, as if asking a question. "Of course he isn't such a hot-head as to engage anything very much stronger than the schooner."

"For your sake, I hope he will," I replied gravely.

"Why do you say 'for my sake'?" Miles asked almost angrily.



“Because you have set your heart on a battle with a frigate at the very least, in order to show of what stuff you’re made. Now I’ll venture to say there are many frigates in these waters, any one of which will readily give us the opportunity of seeing what can be done toward capturing her.”

There was no mistake this time but that Miles turned pale; he did not so much as look at me, but kept his eyes fixed on the lines of folded hammocks as he said, evidently trying hard to keep his voice from trembling: —

“While I hope the *Enterprise* may have good luck on her first cruise, I’m not such a fool as to wish she might engage with a craft heavier than herself. If Lieutenant Shaw is wise, he’ll hold back, instead of pushing the schooner forward.”

“To what end?” I asked with a laugh.

“So that we may be ready to give assistance to the heavier vessels. In case of an action, this schooner would be of great service to a frigate, even though she doesn’t amount to much when taken by herself.”

“Sail ahoy!” was the startling cry that put an end to our conversation, and in a twinkling every man jack below was doing his best to force a passage up the narrow ladder ahead of his comrades.



He who had shouted down through the hatchway that hail from the masthead, doubtless did so in a spirit of friendliness for his messmates; but Miles Partlett did not look upon the matter in that light.

"What fool was it who screeched at such a rate?" he asked. "I reckon the officers of this schooner can attend to their own business without any help from him."

"It was Jethro Leighton who gave us the hint," a sailor, who had overheard Miles's ill-natured remark, said with a laugh. "I'll tell him that your nerves ain't as strong as when we were in the Delaware River, or Salem harbor, and ask him to whisper his good news next time anything of the kind turns up."

"I was only joking," Miles said feebly, realizing the kind of an overhauling he might get in case Jethro came to learn what he had said; and by this time the throng was so thinned out, as the old shell-backs scrambled into the open air like so many monkeys, that we lads were able to get to the ladder.

At first I could not discern anything; the sea was running high, and there was a certain haze on the water which dimmed one's vision.

"Where is she, sir?" I asked, making my way to



where Master Jethro was standing near the weather bow, well forward.

“Yonder, lad! You can only make her out when we jump to one of these 'ere surges.”

“Is she an enemy, do you think?”

“I'll take my 'davy on it, though she's showin' Spanish colors. Now we'll give her a look at the stars an' stripes, to see how she likes 'em.”

Miles came to my side just as our ensign was broken out, the wind holding it straight and stiff against the sky in such a manner that it was impossible the stranger could make any mistake as to our being Yankees.

We were rapidly overhauling the brig, for so she soon showed herself to be, and I watched anxiously to see if our ensign had any effect on her.

She made no change of colors, but held her way; and Master Jethro cried with delight:—

“She's a Frenchman, lads, an' carries no more than eighteen guns!”

“Eighteen guns!” Miles repeated, his face showing pale even against the spray which flew over us; and wheeling quickly about, he went below at a rapid pace.



## CHAPTER III

### AT ST. THOMAS

THE knowledge that we were chasing an enemy so excited and confused me that I actually forgot to be frightened, even though now was come the time when we would soon begin to smell burning powder.

When Miles Partlett cried out in alarm on learning that the stranger carried eighteen guns (six more than did the *Enterprise*), I was momentarily startled into a realization of the danger which menaced, but straightway forgot all else in my anxiety lest the brig should be able to draw away from us.

As if in a dream I heard one of the seamen near me say in a low tone to his mate:—

“Her metal is like to be heavier’n ours, an’ we may have a day’s work cut out for us.”

“Ay, but we’ll take her in tow at the wind-up. I allow, what with six more guns, an’ most likely all 12-pounders, she’s twice our weight; but as the cat said to the cow when she was out catchin’ rats, ‘Size don’t cut sich a terrible figger in work of this kind.’”



Save for my almost overpowering fear lest the enemy should outstrip us in the race, I would have shown myself the coward I really was, when it became plain that the brig was fully twice our size; but in the nervous excitement which sent a fellow's blood tingling in his veins until it was on the point of bursting through the skin, I did not realize what might be the end of the chase.

It was as if I hardly breathed while the gallant little schooner crept up inch by inch on the brig; but even in the wildness of the fever which had beset me, I felt a certain curiosity to know why we, who were out after Frenchmen, should be pursuing a craft which carried the Spanish ensign.

Perhaps I asked the man who stood nearest me for an explanation, or it might have been that the sailors were discussing the matter among themselves; I cannot speak with certainty because of the delirium into which I had fallen, but positive it is that I heard one of the crew say:—

“They're showin' that ensign for a blind. If the brig was a Spaniard, she'd soon give us to understand as much, an' not take the chances of havin' some of her spars carried away.”

Then I came to believe beyond a doubt that we



were giving chase to one of the enemy ; but yet failed to realize that soon, very soon, unless some of our spars carried away, the guns would be discharged, and I should be in the midst of an action, betraying rank cowardice or performing, in some fashion or other, my portion of the work.

I neither knew nor cared where Miles Partlett might be ; Jethro Leighton was forgotten ; the only real thing before my eyes was that brig, clothed in a cloud of glistening white canvas, leaping from surge to surge, like a frightened bird striving to escape from the hunter. A great fear came upon me lest she should give us the slip, and I wondered vaguely why our gunners did not try to cripple her.

We gained slowly but surely, as I could tell when the crew cheered exultantly now and then ; the Spanish colors remained at the main truck, however, and over our heads the stars and stripes flamed like a meteor against the clear blue sky.

Then I saw a sudden burst of flame, followed by a puff of smoke, burst from one of the stranger's after ports ; it was possible to distinguish a black missile in the midst of the wool-like vapor, as it came straight toward us, and then a crash, the splintering of timbers, a shower of fragments, a sharp cry of pain.



The chase had opened fire, and a 12-pound shot had struck our rail just abaft the mainmast, cutting its way through the oak planking as a knife cuts through cheese.

At last I was facing an enemy who had shown his teeth, and into my mind came a wonderment because there was no fear in my heart.

I was only conscious of a fierce desire to see our gunners at work; and believing this first shot would be the signal for us to open fire, I shouted fiercely again and again, raging because the schooner remained silent.

Now, after many such scenes, I know that the fever of battle was upon me; the scent of burning powder went to my brain until I was no longer an ignorant lad, fearing lest he should disgrace himself, but simply something in the form of a human being, thirsting eagerly for blood.

Another cloud of smoke; a solid shot came screaming and whistling over my head, cutting through the standing rigging, and sending up a column of water as it sank in the sea ten fathoms away.

Then came the call to quarters, and I ran to my post joyously, but almost ignorant of what I did.

I remember that old Jethro caught me by the col-



lar as I stood near one of our forward guns yelling in rage and excitement, and whirling me around that he might look full in my face, said in a tone of thorough satisfaction:—

“I knew your talk about bein’ a coward was all guff, lad! Your father’s son couldn’t be different from what you’re showin’ yourself, an’ I’ll take back all the harsh words I’ve ever spoken.”

Wrenching myself free from his grasp, hardly understanding his words, I squeezed my body between one of the guns and the port timbers that I might have a better view of the chase, giving no heed whatsoever to the danger, and remaining there while the enemy fired three more shots, one of which carried away a portion of our rigging forward, while the other two whistled overhead.

Then some one pulled me inboard, threatening direst punishment unless I went to my post of duty, and sullenly I obeyed, sore and angry because of being unable to see all that might be going on to make up the action.

By this time, as I afterward learned, the schooner, having stood on close hauled until she was well on the brig’s weather quarter, was in position to deliver a broadside, and our little craft reeled and quivered



from the recoil as six of her guns were discharged almost at the same instant.

From this moment I lost all consciousness of self; there was dimly in my mind the fact that our guns were being loaded and discharged with the utmost rapidity; that I ran here or there in obedience to orders which I do not remember of having heard; that we were enveloped in burning, pungent smoke. It was also borne in upon me like a dream, that overhead, and all around, timbers crashed and splintered; that the rigging, cut by shot, swung and cracked in the air, and that I heard cries of pain.

I understood in some mysterious manner that the enemy was suffering from our fire, and such knowledge gave me sweetest pleasure.

Then, suddenly, the uproar died away, and I found myself standing amid the splintered timbers of the forward bulkhead, with old Jethro's arms around me.

"I'm proud of you, lad, although it was no more than should have been expected from Sam Burton's son. You've shown yourself a true-blooded Yankee, who not only knows how to do his duty, but does it in proper fashion."



"Have we taken the brig?" I cried, giving no heed to the old man's words, though later I was proud because of them.

"No, lad, we've both got enough of the scrimmage for the time bein', seein's how she must really be a Spaniard."

"How do you know that?"

"She's kept her ensign flyin' all the while; an' unless it was hers by right, she'd have run up the frog-eater's colors."

"But why did she open fire?"

"That's what we can't figger out, lad. It was what you might call an accident. Most likely she thought to frighten off a little craft like the *Enterprise*, so's to have a chance of chucklin' in her sleeve; but by this time it has been shown that we don't scare very easily."

"How many of our men were hurt?" I asked, not fully understanding his explanation.

"Only three were scratched, and they ain't knocked about badly enough to go into the sick-bay. I only wish that white-livered Miles Partlett had come to grief."

Until this moment I had given no heed to my comrade, but now I asked eagerly:—



"Where is he? I don't remember having seen him since we began to overhaul the chase."

"An' the reason is that the coward hasn't shown himself from that minute. I saw him sneak down for'ard when Bill True sung out that the brig carried eighteen guns. He's one of those curs who amount to nothin' but wind."

"I don't blame him for bein' afraid," I said soothingly, having great sympathy for a coward because of being one myself, save, perhaps, when the excitement of an action threw me into a fever. "You know, Master Jethro, how I felt about signing articles for a vessel of war."

"There's a big difference 'twixt you an' him, lad. You counted yourself a coward, an' showed up in grand style when the battle was on; but Miles Partlett claimed to be wonderfully brave, an' hadn't heart enough to stay on deck till the first gun was fired."

"It's too bad; I pity the poor fellow," I said with feeling, for I could understand all that was in his heart when he ran below.

"Wait till he shows his head again, an' then he'll see what opinion the crew of the *Enterprise* has of him," Jethro replied in a menacing tone, and at that



point the conversation was interrupted by the orders to set about repairing damages.

When all hands were busily engaged, plugging this shot hole, or splicing that piece of running rigging which had been severed, one could understand how much the little schooner had suffered in the fight which, as I was afterward told, did not continue more than twenty minutes.

She was cut and splintered as if having been under the guns of a 74-gun frigate, and I was filled with wonder and amazement that any of us were yet alive.

To look at the gallant little schooner's wounds, one would have said that if no more than half her crew had been killed or wounded, it was indeed fortunate; but yet our casualties amounted only to three, and these three were so slightly injured that they remained in the cock-pit barely long enough for their wounds to be dressed.

After this I felt positive my fear of being killed in an action would be less in the future, for I realized, as old Jethro had said, that "it isn't every shot which finds its billet."

We had the satisfaction of knowing that the brig had suffered even more than the *Enterprise*. She



was lying hove-to about three miles away, with her crew working like bees to bind up her wounds; and as an old shell-back said while gazing at her, "If she'd been a Frenchman, our prize crew would be aboard by this time."

We had proven ourselves and the schooner; from this moment every soul on board would have more courage, for we had come to know that the little craft might be handled like a canoe, and none of our men, with the exception of Miles, could be frightened into showing the white feather.

There was no good reason why I should not feel proud of myself, even though my behavior was the result of nervousness or fever. I hoped that I would be attacked in a similar fashion when next we met the enemy; for while self is wholly forgotten, any one can be brave.

Before the end of an hour it was understood by all that we would be forced to make port in order to refit after the needless engagement, and I heard one of the midshipmen say that our commander had decided to run into St. Thomas.

As soon as the little schooner was in condition to be gotten under way, a course was laid for the island, both watches working industriously meanwhile,



in order to repair, so far as possible, the damage done our rigging and hull.

When I went below to turn in that night, Miles Partlett had not shown himself. More than one of the crew had threatened to go into the hold and "smoke him out"; but because of the labor necessary, none of the weary men carried their threat into execution, and the lad remained in hiding.

But for the fact that I was stiff and sore in every joint from having pulled and hauled continuously from the time the action came to an end until the moment when it was permitted my watch to go below, I would have sought for the lad who, as I knew, must be thoroughly ashamed of himself, as well as hungry.

I had just lost myself in slumber when I was aroused by a hand laid over my mouth, and on rising to my elbow, I saw by the dim light that Miles had come out of his hole.

"Don't speak," he whispered warningly. "I reckon all hands are down on me because I went below before the fight began."

"What made you?" I asked, disregarding his warning. "You claimed that you only wanted a chance to show what it was possible to do."



"But that was too much of a chance," he whined. "What business had Lieutenant Shaw to put us alongside a craft almost twice as heavy as the schooner?"

"But surely you don't expect he will sneak around till he finds something weaker than the *Enterprise*," I said, surprised that he should try to lay blame on our commander.

"He's got no business to take such great chances. How many were killed?"

"Not one, and only three scratched so slightly that they've been on duty ever since their wounds were dressed."

"What?" he cried incautiously loud. "It's no use to try to fool me, 'cause I could hear the shot strike us."

"The schooner is knocked about badly; but there wasn't blood enough shed to make the smallest kind of a puddle. We're heading for St. Thomas now, to refit."

"Going into port, eh?" Miles said thoughtfully, and added, after a brief pause, "Say, I don't want you to think that I was so awfully scared. At first I counted on laying low till I got the hang of things; but I was coming up if I found that the Frenchmen were having the best of us."



"It took you a good while to find out if we were safe," I replied, angry because he was trying to make me believe such a yarn. "All hands have been working like slaves since the last gun was fired, and you've skulked in the hold, taking your ease."

"If I was wanted on deck, why didn't somebody come after me?" he asked sulkily.

"It is well for you, Miles, that you weren't hunted out, for the men would have made it mighty hot. More than one proposed to search the hold, and it would have been done, too, but for the fact that every fellow was busy and tired. The starboard watch are still tinkering on the schooner, and we who have just turned in will have another whack at it when our time of duty comes."

The lad must have understood by my tone that I was angry with him, for he turned away silently, and I, not minded to add to his sorrows, for it went without saying that he was feeling sore in mind, called him back.

"I know just how you felt, Miles, when you found that we were like to tackle the brig, and I'm not blaming you so severely for trying to get out of harm's way. That you should attempt to clear yourself of the scrape by telling a deliberate falsehood, is what sticks in my crop."



"There's no good for you to put on so many high and mighty airs," he said peevishly. "I'll be bound your heart was in your boots."

"So it was till I forgot myself, and then I didn't know what happened. I've no idea of trying to crow over you, and would have done my best to keep some of the men quiet, if you had come out and done your share of the work after the engagement was over."

"How could I tell but that the Frenchmen had captured the schooner? I wasn't such a fool as to show myself till I knew what had happened."

It was useless to talk with him, for he had shown himself to be even more of a coward than I, and what was worse, if possible, had shirked work when every man on board, even including the officers, bent all their energies to the task of repairing the mischief which had been done.

I turned over in my hammock as token that, for my part, the conversation was come to an end; and Miles sneaked away to his quarters, moving softly lest he should attract the attention of his messmates.

To my surprise, it was broad day when I next awakened. My watch went on duty at midnight, and I should have heard the signal, regardless of my weariness. Now I would be looked upon as a skulker,



which is the meanest term which can be given a lad or man aboard ship; and one can well fancy my feelings, after having but lately been puffed up with pride because of being praised for what I did not really deserve.

I turned out in short order, although I knew full well that all the members of my watch were below again, and crept softly to Jethro Leighton's hammock.

The old man opened his eyes just as I came up, and without waiting for me to speak, said banteringly:—

“I reckon you thought the part you took in the action was enough to give you an extra trick below, eh?”

“I didn't hear the boatswain's whistle; but it wouldn't have put you out very much to give me a shaking.”

Jethro could see plainly that I was angry, and he said soothingly, after indulging in a hearty laugh:—

“It's all right, lad. We didn't count on your turnin' out. Mr. Wadsworth gave orders to leave you below.”

I opened my eyes wide in astonishment. Mr. Wadsworth was our second lieutenant; and although I had been detailed to his watch, he never appeared to know that there was on board a boy who answered to the name of Paul Burton.



"It's a fact, lad," Master Jethro added, seeing the look of incredulity in my eyes. "You did yourself credit yesterday, an' from this on you'll find that all hands rate you as more than a boy aboard, even though you're so set down on the ship's papers."

"I was no more tired than were you, and could have done my share of the work."

"That's all straight, lad. We had a hand in your place; one who is standin' both watches for a spell."

"What do you mean?" I asked, thinking the old sailor was making sport of me.

"We found that little cur of a Miles Partlett in his hammock as if he had been an honest lad, an' kinder persuaded him to go on deck with us. You can count it as a dead sure thing that he did his share of the work while our watch was on duty, and then we turned him over to them as relieved us. They'll keep him movin', or I'm a Dutchman, which I ain't!"

"Then he has been on duty all night!" I cried in distress, for it pained me to know that the lad was being abused.

"I wish he had been; but we didn't sight him till just before our watch was turned out, so he's only done his share since midnight."



"With every man jack aboard jumping down on him, I suppose?"

"Well, they ain't handlin' him like he was eggs, an' that's a fact," Jethro said with a laugh of satisfaction. "Poke your head above the hatch-combin's, an' see how he's gettin' along."

There was no idea in my mind of showing myself as if exulting over the poor fellow's misery, therefore I peered out cautiously, and saw him holy-stoning the deck.

The fact that he was the only person thus employed told that the lad had been kept at the task after the job was finished for the day, and he had the mortification of knowing that his labor was useless.

Some of the men passed him as I looked out, and each in turn struck at or kicked him, as an intimation to work faster.

It was not a pleasant sight to gaze upon, and I went below, thinking that but for the partial unconsciousness which came over me with the odor of the burning powder, I might at that moment be working at his side, despised by all on board.

Two hours later, when our watch was called, I found Miles scraping the anchor cable, and looking





"I PEERED OUT CAUTIOUSLY AND SAW HIM HOLY-STONING THE DECK."







as if he had lost every friend, which came very near being the truth.

As soon as it was possible I went up to the poor fellow, hoping to relieve him in some slight degree by a kindly word; but it appeared as if he counted me among his enemies. He would make no reply, however softly and fairly I spoke, and finally I was forced to leave the sulky lad alone.

Shortly afterward I observed that Master Jethro said something to him, and half an hour later the lad disappeared, therefore I knew the old sailor had taken pity upon him.

Not once during the run to St. Thomas could I coax a word from his lips; and during all that time he was forced to wait upon every member of the crew who came across him, while I was treated in the most friendly fashion, much to my sorrow, for I knew Miles would count me as trying to lord it over him when, as a matter of fact, I could not have changed the condition of affairs by even a hair's breadth.

Indeed, I begged those of the crew with whom I was best acquainted to let up on the lad, arguing that he had been more than punished for what he could not help; and some of the men, among whom



was Master Jethro, promised to forget the cowardice he had displayed unless he should sin in the same manner again.

I did not succeed very well in my purpose, however; for while I pleaded with eight or ten, the remainder of the crew used him roughly, and it was impossible for me to prevent it.

Once we were in port, Master Miles had an easier time of it, although even then he could not have found very great enjoyment in life.

There was so much to be done, and so many strange things to be seen, that the crew had no time to spend on a single lad; and I did not again attempt to renew our friendship, because I had great cause to be disturbed in mind regarding the future.

We had found in port a French lugger, three masted, and carrying the same number of guns as did the *Enterprise*. This vessel had put in for provisions; and since St. Thomas was a neutral port, we could only look at our enemies savagely, while we threatened as to what we would do in case both ships were outside.

It was said that the Frenchman carried an hundred men; but even if she should have had half as many



again, our people would have counted that we were about equal in strength, and all longed most fervently for a meeting on the open ocean.

Of course the members of both crews were given liberty ashore; but our people were threatened with the direst punishment if they provoked a quarrel in the town, and the result was that Yankee and Frenchman would pass on the streets scowling furiously, but neither daring to make even a threatening gesture, for the frog-eaters had probably received much the same orders as we of the *Enterprise*.

It surely was enough to irritate the best-natured Yankee that ever lived, to see an enemy so near and be unable to strike a single blow; but our crew managed to avoid an actual encounter, and while on board, spent the greater portion of their time telling what might be done if Lieutenant Shaw would give them liberty without restrictions for a single evening.

We were surprised to see the lugger at anchor after she was provisioned, and our men pushed forward the work of refitting with the utmost celerity, hoping we might get into trim to follow her when she left port.

Then, one day, when we were nearly ready for sea, and I was standing amidships with Jethro Leighton



looking at the Frenchman, we saw a boat put off from her and pull directly toward us.

"What kind of a game are they up to now?" I asked in surprise. "It can't be possible the captain of that craft is such an idiot as to think he may make a friendly call on Lieutenant Shaw?"

"It's somethin' better than that, lad," Jethro replied gleefully, "an' after this I'll give the frog-eaters credit for behavin' somewhere near like men."

I could make nothing of his words, and told him so plainly, whereat he said in a tone of great content:—

"Look at the officer in the stern-sheets of that gig. Can't you see he's rigged out in his best togs?"

"Well, what of that?"

"A good deal, my boy. He's comin' with an invitation from his captain to meet them outside. As the swells ashore would put it, he's bringin' a challenge; an' I'll bet a penny's worth of silver spoons that our commander will give him all he wants."

"Then you think we'll have a chance to fight the lugger?" I asked, my heart growing heavy, for the old feeling of cowardice was coming upon me again, and now was I terrified after having seen what treatment a Yankee crew would deal out to one who showed the white feather.



“Do I think we’ll fight him? I know it, lad; an’ what’s more, we’ll send that same lugger into Boston harbor with a prize crew aboard.”

Even as Jethro spoke, the boat from the Frenchman came alongside; the officer in the stern-sheets hailed, speaking in broken English, and asked permission to come aboard with a communication from his commander.

There wasn’t a man among us who did not understand exactly the reason for this visit, and every shell-back wore a grin of welcome when the officer, with yards upon yards of gold lace covering his uniform, came over the rail. If he had been the President of the United States, our people could not have been so well pleased at seeing him; and I noticed that our officers treated him as if he was a particular friend.

He went below, escorted with due ceremony, and came on deck again ten minutes later, when all on the quarter-deck saluted as he leaped into his boat.

There was no need for the marine stationed aft to tell us why the visitor had come, although our old barnacles insisted on hearing all that was said and done.

“It’s like this, lad,” Jethro said to me after he, with two or three cronies, had heard the story. “The



Frenchman was polite as a basket of chips, an' begun his business by hopin' our commander was well. He found that out mighty soon, an' then he said his captain would be exceedingly well pleased if Lieutenant Shaw would meet him outside as soon as the *Enterprise* was in fightin' trim. Well, perhaps Lieutenant Shaw didn't agree to do anything in that line that would suit the frog-eaters! He wasn't to be outdone in fine words, though, an' instead of tellin' the fancy officer that we'd wipe the ocean up with the lugger in about half an hour, he said he'd go wherever suited the Frenchman."

"Then we are really going to fight?" I asked, grown stupid with surprise and fear.

"Why, of course we are, an' it'll go way ahead of what follows at the end of a long chase, for everybody will be in prime condition. Jest turn it over in your mind, Paul, my boy! We're to run out; the Frenchman follows; there'll be a bit of manoeuvrin' for position, an' at it we go, hammer an' tongs, till the lugger hauls down her colors."

"To hear you talk, one would think your whole life had been spent on a privateer or government vessel," I said almost petulantly.

"It don't need much trainin' to make a man feel



like whippin' an enemy, my boy," Jethro replied, feeling so happy that my petty show of irritation could not affect him.

I went below, where it would be possible to consider the matter without being interrupted by the rejoicings of our men,—for it was as if every one of them had suddenly been crazed; and, once alone, I looked at the situation with as much calmness as possible.

It was useless to disguise the fact that I had had a narrow escape from being set down as a coward on the day we met the Spaniard. If the fever had not come upon me, I might have joined Miles in his hiding-place; and was it probable that I would be so fortunate again?

In fact I felt positive that when next we met an enemy, I would be literally paralyzed with fear, and then my messmates must know me for what I really was,—a fit comrade for Miles Partlett.

The perspiration streamed down my cheeks as all these thoughts came into my mind, and I was mighty near to crying when Jethro Leighton came below.

"Hello, what's goin' on here?" he cried on seeing me. "Why ain't you on deck, celebratin' the visit from the frog-eater with the gold lace?"



At this late day I do not understand how I managed to pluck up sufficient courage to tell Jethro all that was in my mind, but I did succeed in doing so, however; and when I was come to an end of the shameful story, the old man laughed until the tears rolled down his cheeks.

“Scared, eh? Count that you’re going to make the same show Miles Partlett did? Well, listen to me, lad, while I tell you that every man who has any decent backbone about him, feels a certain fear when he’s goin’ into action. I’ve heard many a brave fellow talk just as you’re talkin’, an’ when the time came, do exactly as you did the other day. I don’t have any fear that you’ll disgrace us, for you haven’t got it in you to make sich a fool of yourself as Miles did; so come on deck, an’ see our lads plumin’ themselves over what’s to happen within the next two or three days.”



## CHAPTER IV

### THE LUGGER

WHILE I did not fully believe all Jethro Leighton said to me when I was weighted down with apprehensions regarding the future, his words heartened me wonderfully, and I almost came to believe perhaps I might once more appear to be brave, although it would be necessary that I have another attack of the fever.

In obedience to his command I followed the old man on deck, and arriving there, stood like one bewildered, for the scene which met my gaze was indeed strange after the discipline which had been maintained on board the schooner.

The old shell-backs had, for the time being, given themselves wholly up to the most extravagant demonstrations of joy; and the officers, quite as highly elated but ashamed to make any public display, winked at the proceedings by remaining below in order not to see what was going on.

The work of refitting had momentarily come to an



end, that our people might celebrate the reception of the challenge and its acceptance, and every man jack was cutting some antic or another to give proof of his joy because of what was to happen in the near future.

On one portion of the deck two old shell-backs were waltzing after the most approved style; in another place three or four were dancing a hornpipe, each striving to outstrip the other, and elsewhere the men were leaping or darting around like children — perhaps it would be better to say, like monkeys.

Every face save one was radiant with joy, and that single gloomy countenance belonged to Miles Partlett, who was not allowed to join in the festivities, but forced to continue at the task of slushing down the standing rigging, while now and then one man or another would make the most dismal threats as to what should happen if the lad showed the white feather again.

With such a scene around me I forgot myself entirely, and most likely made as big a guy of myself as did the others, although now and again the thought of what might come in the future caused my face to grow pale with a fear which I did not dare to show.

When this celebration had been continued nearly



an hour, Mr. Wadsworth came on deck, and immediately order was restored.

Those who had been singing the loudest, or dancing the most furiously, were straightway transformed into the demurest of sailormen, and work was resumed where it had been dropped when the lace-bedecked Frenchman came on board.

Our people had no sooner set about their several tasks, however, when suddenly the lugger was decked out with flags, intended, no doubt, to show us that her crew was quite as well pleased as we at the prospect of a fight.

It was a display of rejoicing which we could not pass by in silence, and two or three of the older men held a hurried conversation with Jethro Leighton, after which he beckoned for me to join them.

It was a great compliment for a lad like myself to be summoned to a private interview with sailors like Jethro's companions, and I obeyed the signal, feeling every whit as well pleased as if suddenly called for a friendly chat by one of the officers on the quarter-deck.

"Look here, lad," old Jethro began as I stood by his side, "we're of the mind that it would look shabby if we didn't dress ship when that 'ere lugger has gone an' got herself rigged out like she is. You're standin'



pretty well with Mr. Wadsworth since the scrimmage with the Spaniard, an' we want you to ask the favor of runnin' up our colors in answer to them what are floatin' yonder."

I was indeed complimented by having been chosen as spokesman, and yet considerably disturbed in mind at the idea of asking a favor from the lieutenant, who had never given the slightest sign of being aware that I was on board the schooner.

However, it would not do to linger after the men had made known their desires, and I went aft slowly, feeling almost certain the officer would refuse to hold any conversation with me.

It can well be imagined that by this time I was sailorman enough not to venture very far aft without permission, therefore I planted myself near the break of the deck, where Mr. Wadsworth could hardly fail to see me when he turned to come forward.

To my great surprise he beckoned at once for me to approach; but when I stood before him, cap in hand, I could not utter a single sensible word.

"Well, lad, what is it? After giving us an exhibition the other day of what you could do in the way of fighting, you should be able to speak in proper fashion."



This salutation gave me courage, and after stuttering a bit, I managed to say:—

“If you please, sir, the men want to hoist our colors in answer to those displayed by the Frenchman.”

“And they think the commander likely to grant you a favor sooner than he would them, eh?”

“I believe, sir, they thought if anybody was to get into trouble for asking such a thing, it would better be me than either of them.”

This answer seemed to strike the lieutenant as being very comical, for he laughed heartily, and said a few seconds later:—

“Wait here a moment. Commander Shaw’s reply shall be given through you.”

Then he went below hurriedly, and I could see out of the corner of my eye that every member of the crew, even including Miles, was watching me closely.

In a very short time Mr. Wadsworth returned, and said in a low tone, in order that I might be the first to tell my shipmates the good news:—

“You have liberty to dress the schooner with all her bunting, and she may wear her finery until we leave the harbor to engage the lugger.”

I came very near forgetting to thank the lieutenant.



ant; but, fortunately, remembered my manners in time to say that which was proper, after which I walked forward proud as any peacock.

The men crowded around me when I was forward of the mainmast, and after hearing the word I brought, sent up such a cheer as must have been heard on the Frenchman's decks.

Then, in a twinkling, the little schooner was decked out with all her finery; and when this had been done work was resumed once more, every man doing his best, for all hands believed that the sooner we got into sailing trim, the sooner we would have an opportunity of showing the frog-eaters what could be done.

On this night, for the first time since he had been in disgrace, Miles Partlett came to me just as I was turning in, and said in a whisper lest the men near about should overhear him:—

“See here, Paul, I'm having a mighty hard time of it aboard this schooner, and if I should run away, no one could blame me.”

“But every one would, Miles,” I replied quickly, frightened because the lad should even contemplate doing such a terrible thing. “You can pull yourself through all this trouble by trying to stay at your post when next we go into action. It would be



dreadful to have the word 'deserter' written opposite your name on the articles. You couldn't go home again, and what would become of you?"

"I'm sick and discouraged at being picked upon by every sailor aboard," he said, giving evidence of being about to sulk. "You wouldn't stand such treatment!"

"I'd try to change things, Miles, and that is what you must do. Get out of your head the idea that you can desert, and show the crew you know how to behave."

"Suppose that I am really afraid to stay at my post when there's any fighting going on?" he asked; and my heart ached for him, because I knew there was no difference between us.

I had only seemed to be brave because I didn't really know what was going on, while he failed of being attacked by the fever. It was simply a matter of chance as to which of us first showed the white feather.

Then I tried to tell him how I had felt when we went into action with the Spaniard, and urged that he stand to his post no matter what happened, when next we were sent to quarters.

"We'll soon be ready for sea, and then is your



chance to make a change in affairs, no matter how frightened you may be. We will engage with the lugger in less than three days, so Jethro declares, and you haven't long to wait."

"That's the worst of it!" he said in a tearful voice. "Perhaps if we had more time I could get used to the idea; but it's terrible to think that she'll soon be trying to kill all hands of us!"

"Do the best you can," I said consolingly. "Stick close by me, and I'll help you to stand your ground."

He shook his head disconsolately, as if to say that which I had asked was impossible, and went to his hammock, leaving me feeling mighty sorry for him.

During the next six and thirty hours the crew of the *Enterprise* worked most industriously, each man spurring on his neighbor by reminding him that we could not engage the Frenchman until the schooner was in trim once more; and then came the hour when the Yankee vessel was ready for sea.

The colors had remained flying on both ships, and therefore we could not set a signal to show that the *Enterprise* was in condition to leave port; but Commander Shaw knew how to arrange matters in proper fashion.



On the morning of the day when we understood that all arrangements had been made, the crew of the captain's gig was called away, and Mr. Wadsworth, toggled out within an inch of his life, went over the rail to take his place in the stern-sheets.

The men did not dare to cheer; but I saw the older fellows hugging each other, and in many ways acting like monkeys, therefore I asked for an explanation from old Jethro.

"Don't know what it means, eh?" he repeated, stepping high, as if finding it impossible to keep his feet on the deck. "Didn't you see Mr. Wadsworth, lookin' fit to kill, set off in the gig?"

"Ay, sir, I saw that much."

"Well, he's gone to tell the captain of the lugger that we'll meet him anywhere he pleases. We'll be under way in an hour, lad, an' then you'll see the fight of your life, unless the frog-eaters lose the courage they had when the challenge was sent!"

Jethro could not stop to give me further information, for the first lieutenant was issuing orders thick as huckleberries in a pasture lot, and even a greenhorn might have seen that the *Enterprise* was being put in trim for getting under way.

"We're going out right soon?" Miles found oppor-



tunity to whisper in my ear a few moments later, and the statement was in the tone of a question.

"That's the way it looks. There's Mr. Wadsworth going over the lugger's rail this minute, and when he comes back we'll know whether the Frenchman can go out for a sail to-day."

"And you don't feel a bit frightened?"

I was angry with the lad for asking such a question. Until that moment I had given no heed to what might happen; but thought only that we were about to take the first prize of the cruise. Now he had spoken, however, the cold chills ran up and down my spine as I realized that very soon, most likely, I would be standing face to face with death.

"Look here, Miles Partlett," I said sharply, "you must put an end to this hunting after trouble, or you'll succeed in making me remember myself! Don't think of the danger until it's close aboard, and perhaps by that time you can't understand it! Wait till we're lying alongside the lugger, and then see what'll happen."

"It'll be too late then to do anything," he whined, and my irritation increased.

"It's too late now, for that matter!" I cried angrily. "You couldn't get ashore, even if you had



fully decided to desert, therefore employ your mind in some other way than by searching for danger."

Mine was not the kind of advice Miles wanted, and he turned away as if in a rage, while I strove to the utmost of my power to prevent cowardice from creeping into my heart.

There was no need to ask a single question when Mr. Wadsworth returned. The expression on his face told that he had found the Frenchman ready; and even though we had not seen the officer, one glance at either of the gig's crew would have been sufficient. All of them were grinning like apes, and our men knew the reason.

Some one began to cheer, and in an instant our fellows were yelling like madmen, stopping only when the commander came on deck.

He waited to hear Mr. Wadsworth's report, and then stepping to the break of the quarter, looked down on his crew, for every man jack of them had gathered amidships, as if it was their right to be told the news.

"The captain of the lugger has declared his willingness to meet us five leagues off the coast," Commander Shaw said, by way of beginning. "It isn't necessary for me to urge that every man do his full



duty. Your eagerness to meet the enemy has shown your intention and desire; therefore, instead of trying to excite you, I shall indulge in a word of caution. Don't be too certain of the victory, although there can be no question but that we shall win one. Work leisurely, taking careful aim, and watch like hawks for some mistake of the enemy by which you can gain an advantage. It only rests with us as to whether the stars and stripes float from the Frenchman's masthead this night; and unless I'm greatly mistaken in your disposition, we'll hoist them there before the sun sets."

Our people cheered again and again when the commander ceased speaking, and after letting them get their fill of noise, he waved his hand for silence.

"To your posts, now, and see that every order is obeyed on the instant, for a good portion of victory depends upon how the vessels are handled."

Then Mr. Wadsworth, having changed his fine uniform for an old suit of clothes, came forward to repeat the commander's orders, and in a twinkling we were getting the little schooner under way.

I did more than my share of the work which followed, for by keeping my fingers employed I might prevent myself from looking forward to the danger.



There was no question in my mind, and all the others were in the same way of thinking, but that we would be alongside the lugger in a couple of hours at the very longest; and it stood me in hand to screw to the sticking-point what little courage I had.

Not until the schooner was under way, gliding like a breath of air out of the harbor, did I chance to see Miles Partlett, and after the first glance I groaned aloud.

The frightened lad was standing like one petrified, near the starboard rail, looking shoreward, as if asking himself whether it would not be best to leap overboard, than remain and take his chances of death when the shot began to fly. He would have had but little difficulty in swimming ashore, and I was really afraid he might attempt some such mad scheme.

The sight of him brought once more to the surface all my cowardly fears, and I knew full well if I spoke with him, his words would only serve to remind me that I was thoroughly frightened by the prospect of taking part in another fight. However, I could not see him disgrace himself for life without making at least one effort to save him; and I went toward the lad, realizing that he would dishearten me at the very moment when I most needed a spur.



"Why not find something with which to busy yourself?" I asked in a whisper. "Almost any one could work himself into being a coward by doing nothing save speculate upon the chances of being killed."

"You're so brave that it appears as if every other person should be able to show the same gallant spirit," he said mockingly; and I took no offence at the remark, knowing he but sought an outlet for his nervous fear, which, as I understood full well, might be lessened by indulgence in angry words.

"I am not minded to repeat again and again that my heart is cowardly," I said sharply; "but certain it is that I, or any other, would work mischief by brooding over one disagreeable thing. Put from your mind, as I am trying to do, the thought that we are standing out to do battle. Set about some task which demands your entire attention, and you will be taken by surprise when the first gun is fired."

He turned away as if impatient because I tried to aid him, and it seemed worse than useless to press acceptance of my advice where it was not wanted; therefore I set about following my own precepts.

The men were, as may be supposed, in the highest spirits, although I noted the fact that each strove to repress any demonstration; and there was no little



balm in the thought that perhaps some of them found it necessary, as I did, to force down a timorous heart lest disgrace might follow.

Jethro watched me narrowly as I sought here and there for something with which to occupy my hands, and understanding why I needed work of some sort, called my attention to this or that trifling duty which might be performed.

In trying to lend assistance, he came near paralyzing me with terror by putting me to the task of strewing the gun-deck with sand,—a duty which I had never before seen performed; but knew full well its meaning.

Lest the decks should be rendered slippery by our blood, the planks were to be covered with sand to prevent those who remained unhurt from getting a fall, and the thought that I might be making ready something to soak up my own life fluid was rather more than I could contemplate calmly.

Then, to make a bad matter worse, while I was working and at the same time striving earnestly to keep back my timorousness, Miles Partlett came up curiously, as he asked:—

“What are you doing with that sand?”

I would have avoided the question for his own



sake ; but he insisted upon an answer until in turn I lost my temper, and gave him a full explanation.

He turned pale around the mouth, as might have been expected, and hurried away as if I was his mortal enemy, instead of a lad who suffered mentally quite as much as did he.

Perhaps I am writing at too great length upon such matters, which at the time seemed very important to me, and it is well if I put a stopper on my pen so far as Miles and myself are concerned.

The *Enterprise* was run off shore to the distance agreed upon, and there rounded to in waiting for her antagonist.

As could be told by the aid of glasses, the lugger yet remained at anchorage, and the first thought was that her captain had found it necessary at the last moment to send ashore for something which was needed, hence the delay in making sail ; therefore our people waited patiently.

As a matter of course, those of us forward were obliged to depend upon the officers for information as to the Frenchman's position, because common sailors are not such swells as to carry nautical glasses, and we knew full well, as the moments went by, that the lugger yet remained motionless.



It was not necessary to ask any questions; the expressions on the faces of the expectant officers told that she had not weighed anchor.

When an hour had passed and the frog-eaters had not made a move, our men began to jaw among themselves, speculating as to why the enemy, who had apparently been so eager a few hours previous, was now behaving as if no antagonist remained within sight.

Then came the order to fire a gun as signal that we were ready and waiting; but not a movement was made by the lugger.

As we learned later, her flags were flying all the while in token of willingness to meet us, yet she remained at anchor.

Another hour passed and all was as before. Now our men began to accuse the frog-eaters of cowardice, and those who had been most noisy in their demonstrations of joy when the challenge was brought, spent their breath in heaping reproaches upon the entire French nation.

Noon came; dinner was served out in order that we might not be called upon to fight while our stomachs were empty, and the meal was eaten hurriedly, lest the enemy should come before it could be finished.



Again a signal gun was fired; but, as we who stood forward could tell right well by the expression on the faces of the officers, the lugger remained at anchor as if she had never thought of coming out to tackle the Yankees.

At the end of two hours more we stood well in toward the harbor, fired another gun, and then hauled around for the rendezvous which had been appointed by the frog-eaters themselves.

Then it was that all hands could see the lugger plainly. Her flags yet floated from the mastheads, a lying token that she was ready to fight, but never a move was made toward getting under way.

Among all our crew there was only one who rejoiced because the Frenchmen had fooled us with a show of bravery they never experienced, and that one was Miles Partlett. During the first hour of our waiting for the enemy, he remained near the forward hatch as if it was his purpose to seek the shelter of the hold before a gun could be fired, and his cheeks were ghastly pale.

When our people began to have suspicions that the enemy had sent a challenge which he hoped we would not accept, Miles lounged amidships, and the color returned to his face, only to leave it again as



we stood in toward the harbor; but when we went out for the second time, and it was almost certain the Frenchman intended to remain at anchor, he put on a great show of bravery, strutting forward and aft as if ready to meet single-handed any person who wanted to fight.

A wiser lad would not have made any effort at attracting attention under the same circumstances; but Miles had a very small amount of common sense, and swaggered to and fro until old Jethro lost all patience.

"Look at yonder chicken!" he cried sufficiently loud for all to hear, as he pointed at Miles. "Two hours ago he was tremblin' like a cur, an' now that we seem to have lost a chance to fight because the frog-eaters have swallowed their courage, he's swellin' till there's danger of explodin'. We'll remember these high airs, an' give him a fine show to distinguish himself when next the *Enterprise* goes into action. I'll agree to lash him to the bow gun so there'll be no fear of his sneakin' into the hold."

Before Jethro ceased speaking Miles had wilted; he made such a sudden change of front that all hands burst into a roar of laughter, and from that time until our watch was sent below, the lad kept well out of sight.

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Well, to make an end of the lugger, I will say that we remained at the proposed distance from the shore until night had fully come, and our enemy did not put in an appearance, much to the disappointment of all hands, even including myself.

There was not a man aboard with whom I had any conversation, who failed to make the most dreadful threats as to what he would do in case we came across that lugger again where we might legally attack her; and it is safe to say, also, that never one among us even dreamed our time would come so soon.

At eight bells we bore up and ran to leeward of St. Croix, and before midnight had brought to a small brig which proved to be an American trader captured two days before by a French cruiser.

She had on board a prize crew of six men, and her own crew were confined below, it being the intention of the victors to set the prisoners ashore at St. Thomas; but we were sighted outside, and the Frenchmen did not dare take the chances of trying to slip in without our knowledge.

If the cowardly lugger had come out to meet us according to her own proposition, this prize might have been run in while we were engaged; but as it



was, we took possession of her, for as a matter of course the prize crew made no attempt to resist us, and before sunrise the Frenchmen were prisoners, while the brig's proper crew were sailing her for an American port.

We had accomplished something through the cowardice of the lugger, and this fact went far toward consoling us because we failed of an opportunity to make the capture which, a short time previous, had seemed so certain.

During six and thirty hours we stood off and on near St. Croix, and then all the blood in my body went tingling through my veins as the lookout shouted : —

“Sail ho!”

“Where away?” asked the officer of the deck.

“Two points off the weather bow, sir.”

“Can you make her out?”

“She has the look of a Frenchman. A small cruiser, near about our size, I should say, sir.”

It is impossible for me to paint properly, and with a pen, the picture which ensued.

It was about two hours after noon, and two-thirds of the men were below when the lookout first hailed; but before he had come to an end of his information



every man jack was on deck gazing eagerly in the direction indicated, all hands wagging their tongues at the same time.

The excitement was not lessened when Lieutenant Shaw went aloft with his glass, and after gazing intently at the stranger for a matter of two or three minutes, he came down looking uncommonly happy.

It would have been a hard-hearted man who could have passed that collection of faces, on every one of which was written an eager question, without giving some information, and our commander was not the one to keep his crew in unnecessary suspense.

"Jam her up a couple of points, Mr. Wadsworth," he cried to the second lieutenant, and added, as he turned to face his men: "Yes, lads, she's a cruiser, and we'll hope her officers have stouter hearts than those who command the lugger. I should say we could overhaul her; but it'll be a long chase, unless she's willing to accommodate us."

Then went up from our crew a cheer which would have drowned the roar of cannon, and those delighted old shell-backs darted at once to this halliard or that downhaul, knowing full well what the first order would be.

In a twinkling our schooner was covered with a



cloud of canvas; every sail that could be made to draw was put on her until she was more like a cloud of whitest muslin than an engine of destruction.

This was the first time we had had occasion to press the little craft, and she came fully up to the expectations of those who had declared her to be a "clipper."

Her sharp stem sheered through the green waves, sending up a jet of white spray nearly to the figure-head, while the swirl of waters swept aft on either side with race-horse speed, and meeting astern, formed a milky line straight as an arrow, for those who had by this time been called to the wheel were the best helmsmen to be found in or around Salem.

Often had I heard my father tell of the excitement to be found in a chase of this kind; but I never realized one-half the thrill and tremor which comes upon a fellow as he watches the performance of his own dainty craft, while comparing her with the vessel pursued.

There were times when the gallant little schooner up-reared on the crest of a wave showing a goodly portion of her fore-foot, and I literally held my breath, fearing lest she would fall off the course when the next plunge was made.



I need have had no fear regarding those old shell-backs who stood, one either side the wheel like statues, watching sharply the needle of the compass, and holding the vessel to her course with not so much variation as could be measured by the breadth of a hand.

Fresh-water sailors often talk of the exhilaration of sailing a small craft with plenty of wind; but no one can even imagine the emotions which come at such a time as was this.

I found no opportunity to think of what would happen at the end, when we were alongside the chase. Had a third vessel been pursuing, and pitching shot after shot into us, I could not even then have given any heed to the danger, so thoroughly was I engrossed with the race.

There was no thought in my mind for Miles, and it would have been, for me, as if he never had an existence; but old Jethro must needs remind me that the fellow was yet on board.

"That little coward is at his tricks again," the old man said angrily, as he came up to where I was standing. "When a lad can make a show of himself at such a time as this, you may set it down for a fact that his spine is built of mush instead of bone."



I turned and saw Miles standing near the forward hatch, gazing around uneasily, and displaying every evidence of fear, even though with the best of good fortune we could not hope to come up with the enemy for two hours or more.

Even then, when he should have been lifted out of himself, so to speak, by the on-rushing motion, which is like unto nothing save flying, he was speculating upon the danger which the future might possibly have in store for him.

I no longer had any pity for a lad like him, and said sharply, forgetting that I myself was a coward:—

“It gives a fellow a bad taste in the mouth to look at him standing there gazing ahead for trouble, instead of enjoying what’s around him.”

“Ay, that it does, lad,” Master Jethro replied with a gesture of impatience, “an’ I’m hopin’ he’ll fall overboard some fine day when it won’t be possible to launch the boats!”



## CHAPTER V

### BRAVE FRENCHMEN

THE enemy was doing his best to get away from us, although he must have been aware by this time that there was little or no difference between us either in size or weight, and I said to Master Jethro, as we two stood well forward watching the chase:—

“So far as I have seen, the Frenchmen appear to be afraid of fighting. The prize crews we have taken yielded without even the shadow of resistance; the lugger challenged and then backed down, although she was the stronger, and now this fellow is doing his level best at showing us his heels.”

“Ay, lad, all you say is true, and yet there are brave Frenchmen to be found, as you’ll learn if the *Enterprise* has good luck. We haven’t had what you might call a fair try at ’em yet. The prize crews would be fools to show fight, when, as a rule, they don’t number more’n a dozen all told, an’ they on board a merchantman. The lugger is the first real



coward we've run across, an' why she didn't come out beats me. I might have thought that she wasn't in good trim, short of ammunition, or awkward to handle, but for the fact that she deliberately challenged us."

"They hoped to make such a show of fight that we'd back down, and thus give them a chance to crow over us," I replied with a laugh, for the coward in my heart was sleeping soundly just at this time. "That fellow ahead isn't any too willing to make our acquaintance."

"But we can't accuse him yet awhile of bein' faint-hearted," old Jethro said, evidently in the humor to apologize for the shortcomings of his enemy. "There's no knowin' what shape he may be in, an' the man who stands up to fight when he ain't in proper trim is a fool."

"It looks as though this fellow would be called upon to show what he can do, or to haul down his colors; we're coming up with him hand over hand."

"Ay, lad, that's what we're doin', an' before nightfall it'll be a case of fight or surrender for him."

Our schooner proved that she was a very witch for sailing; she overhauled the chase in a manner that caused surprise even among those who had declared



she was a clipper, and fully an hour before sunset the race had come to an end.

We ran up directly in the stranger's wake until it was possible to bring our bow-chaser to bear, and I had forgotten to be cowardly until the moment the gunner began to aim his piece.

Then a cry of derision from some of the crew, as Miles hurriedly went below, brought me to a momentary realization of my own shortcomings.

It was only for a few seconds, however, that I gave any heed to the possibility of disgracing myself, for all was forgotten when Jethro cried excitedly:—

“Now we'll see what they're made of!”

Then the gun was discharged with so true an aim that I saw the missile leap aboard just above the helmsman's head, traverse the entire length of the schooner at a height of not more than three feet above the deck, and go crashing through the rail on the weather bow.

The only gun which the chase could bring to bear upon us was the aftermost on the port side, and this piece I watched with a certain sensation of fear, expecting each instant to see a dense cloud of smoke leap from its muzzle in token that a ball bearing the Frenchman's compliments was on its way toward us.



Not until this moment were we ordered to quarters, and as I went below, it was with a decided inclination to hide myself before the shot should come aboard.

Then it was I understood full well all that was in the mind of Miles Partlett when he fled regardless of everything save the fear in his heart; and I venture to say that but for the lesson I had gained from his experience, I would at that moment have given my shipmates good reason to call me a coward.

I tried to reason with myself that one portion of the schooner was as secure as another, for the ball would go in whatsoever direction the gun was aimed, and a fellow in the hold stood quite as many chances of death as did the officer on the quarter-deck.

During five minutes or more I was most uncomfortable in mind, but succeeded in doing my duty without making too sorry an exhibition of myself; and then, as the schooner's bow was payed off that we might give them a broadside, our men began to cheer.

"What's up?" I asked of the sailor nearest, and he replied gruffly:—

"Look through yonder port, an' you'll see that she's struck without firin' a gun. If we'd left Salem for the sole purpose of findin' cowards, I reckon you could call this cruise a bloomin' success. The Frenchman carries



ten guns at least, an' didn't pluck up spirit enough to let us hear the sound of one."

"It's a saving of powder for us," I replied cheerily, thinking what a fool I had made of myself for giving way to fear when there was absolutely no danger.

"Ay, lad, it's all right when you look at it from the economical point; but it's much like stealin' to overhaul prizes like this. I'd have more respect for the frog-eaters if they'd stand up like men for their own."

How little did that old shell-back, who grumbled because of missing a fight, dream that when we did finally run across a crew of brave Frenchmen, for there were many afloat, he would be one of the very first to fall!

Commander Shaw was not the man to waste time, even though there was no other sail in sight, and in ten seconds after the enemy's flag had been struck, a prize crew was told off to take possession of our new property.

The chase proved to be the schooner *La Sirène*, ten guns and seventy-nine men, and had her captain been so disposed he might have given us a hard rub, for her pieces were so much heavier than ours that the strength of the two vessels was about equal, while *La Sirène* had the advantage in holding the weather-gage of us.



We sent aboard eight men and a midshipman to carry her into port, and because of such small crew, it became necessary to transfer all the prisoners to the *Enterprise* at the expense of no slight discomfort to our people, for with seventy-nine men to care for forward, and six officers quartered aft, it was snug stowing.

Jethro explained to me that the officers would be put on parole not to attempt to escape, therefore they were at liberty to move about in comparative freedom; but the crew was to be confined in our lower hold, where was neither light nor fresh air.

"Yes, it stands to reason that they'll find the quarters uncomfortable; but it'll teach 'em to fight the next time they have a tight little schooner under their feet," old Jethro said in reply to my question, and I added:—

"We couldn't have done differently by them, no matter how brave a defence had been made."

"True for you, lad; but they'd felt better in mind, knowin' a stiff kick had been made to hold their own. Look at that white-livered Miles, will you!"

The prisoners were being brought on board twenty at a time, and my comrade had so far recovered from his fears as to be on deck near the gangway,



much as if he had been ordered to attend to the embarkation. He swaggered to and fro, acting for all the world as if the capture of the prize was due wholly to his efforts, and finally fell to bullying the prisoners as they were sent below.

At this stage of the game Jethro took a hand by belaboring Master Miles with a rope's end, and, following his example, others of our crew assisted until the lad was glad to seek shelter below.

We laid by *La Sirène* until nearly midnight, transferring the prisoners and taking out the greater portion of her ammunition, together with two guns which could be used as bow-chasers for the *Enterprise*, after which the two ships parted company, our prize to stretch away for New York or Boston, according to circumstances, and we laying a course for St. Kitts, as had been previously agreed upon.

We made port within four and twenty hours, and at once began putting on board a supply of water and provisions. The Yankee squadron which Commander Shaw had expected to find here was not to be seen, and instead of loafing at anchor, we set sail the following day, hoping to pick up another prize before meeting our countrymen.

Our duties on shipboard were changed considera-



bly on account of the prisoners. It had been the purpose of our commander to leave the Frenchmen at St. Kitts; but to this the authorities of the port would not agree, and we were obliged to go to sea with what old Jethro called "a full cargo."

Because of this, six men from each watch were told off to care for the "cargo," and, much to my displeasure, Miles and myself were among the number, which meant that we two lads would do all the work, while the remainder of the guard did nothing but order us here and there according to their fancy.

It was not for me to complain, however, and I put the best face possible on the matter, while Miles was overjoyed at the idea of being allowed to spend the greater portion of his time at a safe distance from those who were constantly racking their brains in the effort to make life a burden for him.

"Are we to stay down there day and night?" he asked of me after the draft had been made, and I referred the question to Jethro, who said with an air of exceeding wisdom:—

"You'll be called on to keep an eye out pretty much all the time, except when we go into action, an' then it'll be a case of clappin' the hatches on. Rations will be served by the cooks, an' three times



a day you lads may feel obliged to move lively in order to feed the boarders. I see that Joe Staples is detailed to head the gang of keepers, an' you'll find out from him exactly what your duties are."

Staples was an old sailor whom I had known in Salem, and, with the exception of Jethro, the one man above all others of our crew in whom I felt perfect confidence. He was a thorough seaman, had made two cruises in a privateer under my father's command, and was counted to be square and honest.

Before we left port he called the guards together and mapped out each man's duties. Six of the older seamen were to stand guard continuously, making two-hour watches, which kept three men constantly on the lookout against any attempt at escape. Miles and I were to supply the prisoners with food and water, and two of the men had been detailed to aid in bringing the provisions from the galley. It also devolved upon us lads to act as messengers for the Frenchmen when they had complaints to make, or desired to communicate with any of their officers; therefore, as can readily be seen, it was not likely we would have much spare time on our hands.

In event of an action it was arranged by Master Staples that the prisoners should be locked into the



four cages which served as the schooner's prison, and the hatches of the lower hold closed and barred, in order that all hands might take part in the fighting.

This last portion of the programme did not please Miles, and he said to me privately:—

“Staples is making a big mistake when he counts on leaving the prisoners alone during an action. That is just the time when they ought to be looked after the most carefully, because it would be all up with us if the crowd got loose when we had our hands full with the crew of another vessel.”

“And you would like to be detailed as guard during such time,” I said, laughing at his scheme for sneaking.

“Well, I'd rather stay here than on deck, and that's a fact; but all hands are making a big mistake if they think I don't dare to stand up to the guns like a man. It's when we tackle a vessel bigger than the *Enterprise* that I get scared.”

“All we have met thus far were about our own size,” I ventured to suggest.

“They were heavier, according to all accounts.”

“And you claim that if we met one carrying the same weight and men, you could do full duty?”



"Of course I would."

"Tell that to Master Staples, and I dare say he'll give you orders to stay below when matters are not to your liking."

Whether Miles ever acted upon my advice I am unable to say, because the time was so near at hand when he gave ample proof that he could not stand to the guns no matter how small was the enemy.

The task of waiting upon the prisoners was not at all to my liking. It gave me pain to see the poor fellows, even though they were enemies, deprived of their liberty, and besides, I knew full well that they suffered many discomforts because of the lack of space in which to take exercise. They were penned up in cages where never a glimpse of the sun might be had, and forced to breathe the foul air of the hold, which could not be purified unless we had spent the time and money to rig up windsails, and such work was not to be thought of under the circumstances.

When we left St. Kitts it was with the belief that we might cruise around a week or more before sighting an enemy, therefore I tried to settle down contentedly to the dull task of guarding prisoners, but it was no easy matter to put on a cheerful face under such circumstances.



To the joy and surprise of all, particularly in my own case, a sail was sighted within four and twenty hours after leaving port, and soon we learned that the *Enterprise* had in chase a small French cruiser carrying not more than four guns.

She was a small craft indeed, but an enemy, and would add to our list of prizes; therefore the necessary time in which to take her must be spent, although all believed it was only a question of so many hours as would be required in which to overhaul her.

That she would make any resistance, no one so much as dreamed. Thus far we had found the Frenchmen ready and almost willing to strike their colors, even when they were strong enough to hold us in check quite a spell; therefore if any one had predicted that this fellow might give us a hard fight, he would have been looked upon as a very poor kind of prophet.

It so chanced that I was on deck getting a whiff of fresh air when the officers made out the size of the schooner to leeward of us, and I went straightway to Miles Partlett, saying, when we were within speaking distance:—

“Here’s a chance for you to distinguish yourself,



lad. We are running down on a little bit of a schooner which mounts only four guns, and therefore can't carry more than half our number of men. By sticking to the deck this time you'll see a Frenchman strike his colors, and it would be well to have the opportunity of saying, when we are back in Salem again, that you really witnessed such a scene."

"How do you know her size to such a nicety?" Miles asked, as if suspicious that I might be playing him a trick.

"I heard Mr. Wadsworth, who has been aloft, tell the first lieutenant. Of course she won't attempt to fight us, and you can make a great show of bravery without running any risk. Ask Master Staples if you may stay on deck until we've taken the enemy, and he'll begin to believe that you're a regular fire-eater."

Miles reflected a moment, during which time he looked me straight in the eye, to make certain I was not deceiving him, and even then was so cautious as to go on deck in order to learn all the particulars for himself, before venturing to be put on record as wishing to take part in a sea-fight.

Ten minutes later he returned looking very well pleased, and said with a swagger:—



“That vessel won’t make a mouthful for the *Enterprise*; she’s no larger than a small fisherman. Jethro Leighton says most likely she’s nothing more than a smack that has been armed to capture the small craft around these parts.”

“And you are satisfied that there can be no danger in remaining on deck until she is our prize?” I asked, and it was impossible to repress a certain feeling of contempt for so cowardly a lad.

“You’ll find that I can hold my own with the best, when it comes to attacking a vessel somewhere near our size,” Miles said valiantly, and the words had no more than been spoken before Master Staples came down the ladder.

“Ask him now,” I whispered, and Miles made the request in much the same tone as if he had proven himself to be the hottest firebrand among us.

“Grown brave since you’ve found out that the chase won’t make half a mouthful for us, eh?” the old sailor said with a sneer. “I reckon you’re countin’ on gettin’ credit for wantin’ to be at the guns when you know they won’t be fired,—except, perhaps, to signal the frog-eaters that they must heave to.”

“Any fellow is likely to be frightened at times,” Miles said, with a whine, “and you’ll never know



what I can do if you keep me below. How do we know the little vessel won't show fight?"

"It ain't reasonable to suppose she'll engage a schooner three times her size," Master Staples said contemptuously. "However, you may go on deck an' get such credit for showin' yourself at this time as the crew are willin' to give. I reckon, Paul," he added, turning to me, "that it wouldn't go agin the grain if you had a chance to see the little prize round to under our guns?"

"It isn't probable that I'll be needed, but of course I'd like to go on deck," I replied with due respect.

"Very well, be off with you; but keep your eye on that white-livered Miles, for if somebody happened to fire a pop-gun by mistake, he'd fall in a fit."

"Perhaps you'd like to have me help put the hatches on, sir," I ventured to suggest, whereupon Master Staples said with a laugh:—

"Bless you, lad, I'm not countin' on takin' that trouble. There won't be any fightin', an' it's needless to make so much work for ourselves. Get along on deck an' pick up all the fun you can out of the business."

One can readily suppose that I did not linger in that dismal hold many seconds after the permission



had been given; and by the time Miles had taken up his station well forward, as if to direct matters, I was standing by Jethro's side.

He was considerably disgruntled because Master Staples had allowed the lad to come up when it was a foregone conclusion that the enemy would make no resistance, and after much grumbling, said finally:—

“It's only givin' him a chance to plume himself on takin' part in a capture, when we know full well he wouldn't show his nose above the hatchway if there was any danger of our firin' a gun.”

I was not disposed to take up the cudgels in behalf of Miles, therefore made no reply; but went forward where I might the better see what was taking place.

The little schooner was making a brave effort to escape from us, and she was no mean sailer for a craft of her size. The Frenchmen were carrying every rag of canvas that could be shown to the breeze, and handling her like skilled seamen; but all that did not prevent us from overhauling her in fine style.

Before I had been on deck half an hour she was almost within range of our bow-chasers, and there was no longer any question as to her strength.

She had but four guns, mounted two on each side



of the open deck, and one would have said that she could not overpower a party of marines in a long-boat, if it so happened that the men could use their muskets fairly well.

Miles, satisfied that the enemy was very, very weak, shouted and bawled as if it was his duty to animate the crew into attacking a 74-gun frigate, and otherwise made himself so conspicuous that some of the men, who felt as if it was almost cowardly to tackle a craft so much our inferior, threatened to stop his noise with a wad of oakum well slushed.

It was a difficult matter to check the lad, who firmly believed he was fully atoning for the lack of courage previously shown; he continued his outcries until Master Jethro gave him a sound flogging, and even then he would break forth into spasmodic yells whenever it seemed safe so to do.

Miles even stood erect when one of our bow guns was fired as a signal for the schooner to heave to; but there was a look of perplexity on his face when the Frenchman stood on in utter disregard of our orders.

So small was the enemy that the officers had not even thought it necessary to send us to quarters; and when the first signal failed to attract attention,



one of the gunners stepped forward, expecting that a second shot would be sent ahead of her.

"There's no need of wasting the powder," Mr. Wadsworth said with a laugh. "We'll have her alongside in ten minutes, and then I reckon she'll understand her duty."

Miles was yet displaying his noisy courage, when we forged slowly past the little craft until she was under our broadside, and then the commander hailed:—

"Schooner ahoy! What craft is that?"

"The letter of marque *La Seine* of Bordeaux, four guns and fifty-four men."

Many of our people laughed at the valiant reply, which was given in fairly good English, for the captain of the little boat had spoken as boldly as if his craft was a frigate at the very least; but Commander Shaw went through the usual ceremonies of a meeting at sea between hostile vessels.

"This is the *Enterprise*, twelve guns and eighty-three men. Heave to under our quarter."

"You must first show us why we should do so," the Frenchman said boldly; and our old shell-backs pricked up their ears in pleasure and surprise.

Commander Shaw looked down at the little schooner as if in pity. Her crew were at quarters, much as



though expecting a battle, and I glanced quickly at Miles.

He evidently failed to understand the situation, and was gaping over the rail at our plucky enemy, without apparently knowing that there was a probability of a battle, one-sided though it must necessarily be.

"I will give you one more opportunity to surrender," the commander cried. "It is useless for brave men to fight against overwhelming odds."

The French captain raised his hat politely, and Jethro said in my ear:—

"There's what you might call a brave man, though I can't say overly much for his wisdom. Blow me if I don't believe we'll have to fire into him! I'd give a month's pay if he was our equal in men an' metal, for there'd be a power of glory in bringin' such as he appears to be to terms."

Our commander stepped back to speak with Mr. Wadsworth, and I believed he was directing that officer to send the men to quarters, when the enemy let fly his port broadside of two guns with such effect that the splinters bristled from our starboard rail, and that sailor who, after the capture of *La Sirène*, had complained bitterly because the Frenchman struck without showing fight, fell dead almost at the feet of Miles.



The lad gave vent to a shriek of fear which must have been heard on board the enemy, and ran aft at full speed just as the order was given for us to go to quarters.

The enemy was reloading, and even though we had despised her because of her weakness, it could plainly be seen that we would be forced to purchase the victory, if one was gained.

I was running side by side with Jethro as we went to our posts, and the old man said in a tone of genuine regret:—

“It’s a big pity that frog-eater hadn’t a frigate under his command, for he’s got plenty of pluck. If he’d been aboard *La Sirène*, we’d had a hot job.”

At the earliest possible moment we let go a full broadside at the little boat, and she returned it in great style, her guns being aimed so exactly that three of our men were wounded by splinters.

When the report of the guns had died away, and while all hands were reloading with the utmost haste, for now we were eager to inflict injury despite the difference in size, I heard a volley of screams from Miles Partlett, and, an instant later, saw him striving to lift the hatch leading to the lower hold.

Master Staples had evidently fastened it down



when the first gun was discharged, and Miles, who had counted on seeing a peaceable capture, found himself in the midst of a regular battle.

"Bring that sneak down this way!" Jethro shouted as he tugged at No. 2 gun. "This time he shall have a taste of work such as he allowed would be his pleasure."

I did not have time to observe what was done with the lad; I only noted that one of the men began dragging him in the direction of where Jethro stood, and that the fellow was screaming at the full strength of his lungs, when my name was called by Master Staples, which summons led me away from the scene.

Then we had such a job on our hands that there was no time in which to watch the veriest coward who ever drew breath, for the enemy was fighting gallantly, sending every shot into us, and had they been our equals, I believe of a verity the *Enterprise* would have been forced to draw off for a time.

I was neither frightened, nor did I have a severe attack of fever; the Frenchman was so weak that I could but wonder how long he would hold out, and felt eager to bring the affair to a speedy close in order that brave lives might be spared. I no longer



exulted when a shot went home ; but felt sad because the colors still remained at the mastheads of the enemy.

Twice within the next ten minutes were we struck below the water-line, and meanwhile our maintopmast was carried away ; but we poured such a dose of iron into *La Seine* that she looked to be a wreck, although her guns were speaking with precision and regularity.

As a matter of course such a one-sided fight could have but one ending, and in twenty minutes from the time the Frenchman fired his first broadside, the little craft surrendered.

When her colors were hauled down after such a gallant resistance, our men refrained from cheering, and Commander Shaw lifted his hat when he hailed to know if the schooner was badly cut up.

Later, when the crew of the schooner was in line on her deck, the men of the *Enterprise* cheered them to the echo, and then it was that *La Seine's* captain saluted with the utmost politeness, saying as he did so :—

“We are fortunate in having met with such a generous enemy.”

“It's a poor sailor who doesn't appreciate courage



when he sees it," Commander Shaw replied, and thus we poured out compliments like a lot of dancing masters, after having tried our best to kill each other.

It was soon learned that *La Seine* was not cut up below as badly as was the *Enterprise*. Our shot had done more damage to her spars and rigging, while she had plumped at least four balls into our hull in such fashion that the carpenters were called away to plug the holes until we could put into port and make repairs.

The French captain came on board our vessel, and after a long confab in the cabin, as we were told by one of the marines, it was decided that both schooners should lay a course for St. Kitts.

The enemy had twenty-four men either killed or wounded, which was almost half her crew, and the remainder gave their paroles not to make any attempt to retake the vessel, therefore they remained at liberty on board their own craft.

After our wounded had been attended to, the surgeons from the *Enterprise* went on board the prize, and there they remained when we got under way once more.

Not until we were headed for port did I give any heed to Miles; but then he was nowhere to be seen.



The lower-hold hatch still remained down, therefore I believed he had not succeeded in getting below, and after a short search I became convinced that he was not on the gun-deck.

In vain did I hunt for him; none of the crew remembered having seen the lad after he was dragged toward Master Jethro, and the old sailor declared that he had not touched him because at that time a shot had come through the port, scattering splinters in every direction.

"He must have been struck by the flying fragments and knocked overboard," I said sadly, and Jethro agreed with me.



## CHAPTER VI

### A SHOW OF TREACHERY

WHEN it seemed to me positive Miles Partlett was no longer on board the *Enterprise*, I felt reasonably certain that instead of being knocked overboard by splinters, he had leaped over of his own free will, bringing about death by drowning, because his timorousness was so great that he could not endure the terror which seized upon him when the ship was in action.

It was because of this belief that I did not make a more thorough search for the lad. He had threatened before to kill himself rather than take part in an action, and what was more reasonable to suppose than that he had voluntarily gone over the rail when we so suddenly found ourselves in the midst of an unexpected engagement?

I think the crew generally were satisfied rather than sad, when it was given out by old Jethro that the lad who had brought such disgrace upon himself was no longer alive. Death was the only means of



escape for Miles, and the one way by which the schooner could be freed of his presence until after she had returned to the home port; therefore, so the old sea-lawyers argued, it was the easiest path out of a most disagreeable difficulty.

If Miles Partlett could have been there to have seen for himself what a slight ripple his departure made in our little world, he would have been grievously disappointed by the knowledge of his own insignificance, according to the opinion among the crew of the *Enterprise*.

After the first comment upon his disappearance, which was generally a harsh one, no person gave any further heed to the boy who had made such a great display of cowardice. Within a space of two or three hours he was dropped out from among us as if we had never known that such a lad once lived.

It was far different in the case of the seaman who fell under the enemy's first broadside. His shipmates paused now and then amid their work of clearing up after the action, to remind each other of this or that good quality which had been displayed by the man who had lost the number of his mess; and every member of the crew seemed to consider it a positive



duty to speak in a kindly way concerning him whose life had been the cost of the engagement.

While the French captain was in the cabin of the *Enterprise* with our commander, Master Jethro went into the cockpit to learn how many of our people were disabled, and there found that the little enemy had, in addition to killing one, wounded five, — none very seriously, to be sure, but sufficiently so to prevent them from reporting for duty within the next two or three days.

Every able-bodied man on board was busy during the first two hours after we got under way, with the prize following close astern, and therefore it was that I had no opportunity of speaking with Jethro regarding the disappearance of Miles. I believed, as has already been set down, that the lad had made way with himself, and was eager to have the old sailor's opinion on the subject; therefore as soon as the more important of the work had been finished, and permission given for the watch who ought to have been below to knock off work, I drew Master Jethro aside for the purpose of holding converse with him on that matter which was so very near my heart.

Before I could make a beginning, however, one of



the marines who had been stationed aft came forward with a bit of intelligence which he thought of the greatest interest, and straightway demanded the old sailor's attention.

"We are like to get rid of our prisoners in short order," he began, and Master Jethro pricked up his ears. "Our commander has been discussing with the French officers the question of turnin' them loose at St. Kitts."

"We have tried that once, an' found it didn't work, so what's the use of harpin' away on it?" the old sailor said impatiently, for he was not minded to pay very much heed to second-hand opinions which had already been discussed by all the sea-lawyers on the gun-deck.

"Ay, man dear, so it has been tried; but this time they're to be landed on a different footin', bein' sent to jail for safe keepin', since we're allowin' to run our little prize in for the purpose of makin' her ready for a voyage to the United States, as we've the right even in a neutral port, an' then convert her into a cartel for the exchange of prisoners. If such a plan works, we'll clean out our lower hold in short order."

"We're not likely to get rid of the frog-eaters so



easily," Master Jethro replied curtly. "You'll find the authorities at St. Kitts up to snuff, an' can't be imposed on as you're reckonin'."

"In that case our commander has another trick up his sleeve, accordin' to all I heard while on duty," the marine continued, as if determined to enchain the old sailor's attention. "He'll claim the right to send all his prisoners ashore while we're refittin', an' rather than that should be done, it is allowed the officials of the port will agree to our makin' the transfer in whatsoever way pleases us best."

"Now we're puttin' the matter in a different light," Master Jethro said patronizingly.

"It's the kind of a scheme that may be worked, an' I'm hopin' it will; for it's bad luck, to say nothin' of bein' mighty disagreeable, this havin' a hold full of prisoners."

I had no more time to spend on deck. It was necessary to return to my duties below, else Master Staples would have cause for complaint against me; and much to my own dissatisfaction I descended the forward ladder to the gun-deck where, as was to be expected, I found the lower hatch removed as before the action.

It seemed necessary to make some explanation as



to why I had remained above so long after the prize had been captured, and with this thought in mind I began an apology to the old sailor, who sat on a coil of rope just at the foot of the ladder.

“You needn’t trouble yourself with chinnin’, for I can well understand that it was pleasanter in the open air than down here. When a boy aboard ship does his best to perform the duties assigned him, as in your case, he’ll find others ready to wink at what, in a lad of a different sort, would be set down as shirkin’. That ’ere little Frenchman was a dandy, eh?” he added, his mind going back to the short but sharp engagement. “Who’d have thought that a whiflet like her, hardly bigger’n a long-boat, would have stood up against three times her number of guns? But she paid the price, an’ a heavy one, seein’s how the full half of her crew was killed or disabled. It’s the first brave frog-eater we’ve run across, an’ I’m for takin’ off my hat to the captain who refused to haul down his colors until he had given us a taste of his metal.”

“Did the Frenchmen below here try to kick up any row during the fight?” I asked, not without considerable curiosity.

“There wasn’t any chance for funny business, lad,



seein's how the doors of the cages were fastened stoutly, an' the main hatch barred down."

"You seem to be pretty sure of them now, Master Staples," I said, pointing to that cage which stood farthest aft, the door of which, as I could see by the faint glimmer of a lantern hanging near by, was open a few inches.

"What do you mean?" Master Staples asked, but without looking around.

I referred to what I had just observed, and immediately the old sailor sprang to his feet with an exclamation of surprise and irritation.

"I wonder how that happened?" he said half to himself, on coming back after having relocked the door with a key which hung from one of the stanchions. "I could have sworn that everything was secure, yet it must be I overlooked that 'ere cage."

"Perhaps some other of your crew found it necessary to go in there."

"All hands are on the upper deck; you're the first to come down," he replied thoughtfully. "It must be that I'm gettin' old an' kind er losin' my head."

Apparently he attached but little importance to the incident; but I thought it demanded more attention.



Master Staples was not the kind of a man to lose his head when making ready for action; he had served many years on board a privateer, and knew full well the importance of looking carefully after every detail of his duty, however slight. That he should have left one of the cages open, thus giving to a lot of prisoners, numbering almost as many as our own crew, an opportunity to make trouble for us, was to my mind something not to be believed.

“What’s the news on deck?” he asked, evidently intending to put from his mind such disagreeable thought as a serious neglect of important duty.

I told him what the marine had said regarding the scheme of obliging the authorities of St. Kitts to allow us to put prisoners ashore in a neutral port, which was against all the rules of warfare, and he commented upon it much in this fashion:—

“I’ll be glad when we’re a clean ship once more, for no good ever comes of carryin’ a cargo of the enemy when you’re on a cruise. Suppose the *Enterprise* goes into action with a vessel as heavy, or we’ll say a bit heavier, than herself? We would be forced to look after this portion of the schooner mighty sharp, an’ it would take six men from the workin’ force, which ain’t wisdom, ’cordin’ to my



way of thinkin'. If it so be the scheme can be carried out, I for one will hold up both hands."

Then, to add to my budget of news, I told him that Miles Partlett was missing; probably had been knocked overboard by a splinter, and to this he replied with more of vehemence than I had expected, because I had no idea he was so bitter against the lad:—

"If that has happened, we owe the French aboard *La Seine* more than I allowed at first."

"Do you actually mean to say, Master Staples, that you're glad the poor lad has been killed?" I cried in horror, whereat he replied calmly:—

"I ain't thinkin' of the killin', Paul; but it's the takin' away from us of a useless bit of lumber. When a boy of his size an' age is willin' to set himself down sich a consummate coward, the sooner he's put out of the way of decent men, the better. Now I've taken note more'n once when you've been tryin' to stiffen his backbone, an' seen that words as well as actions were thrown away on him. To a lad like you, who has shown his pluck—"

"Don't give me the credit of being brave, Master Staples, for between you and me it ain't deserved," and then I hastened to explain why I had shown what appeared to be like courage.



The old man interrupted me before I was come to an end, by saying with a laugh :—

“You’re wastin’ your breath, Paul Burton, for him as ain’t afraid in heart when he’s goin’ into action is either a fool or crazy. What do you count for courage? It’s that same thing of bein’ afraid you won’t do your whole duty. I was shipmates once with a man that could or did fight like a tiger whenever he was called upon; but just as soon as the action was over he’d grow pale in the face, an’ his knees would wobble till it was hard work for him to stand up. Why, I’ve seen that old barnacle cover his eyes so he couldn’t see when the gunner was ready for the first shot, an’ then at it he’d go, hammer an’ tongs, doin’ the work of half a dozen men, an’ mayhap cryin’ like a baby all the time. An’ now you come down to what made your shipmate sich a poor specimen of humanity. He hadn’t nerve enough to stay where he belonged when the weather got a bit squally. It’s a good job that he’s gone.”

I was not inclined to let even an old sailor like Master Staples speak harshly of Miles, now that the poor lad was dead, and in dying as he did had atoned for all his cowardice, according to my way of thinking; therefore I harked back to the matter of the



open cage, for it troubled me not a little, more particularly since I must be on duty below until we arrived at St. Kitts; consequently if there was anything like treachery aboard, it stood me in hand to smoke it out.

“It seems strange, Master Staples, that while making ready for action you failed to secure all the prisoners. With seventy-nine on board, which is more than our own men number now we’ve sent a prize crew away, an oversight like that might cost us dear.”

The old man looked at me scrutinizingly for an instant, and then said with a laugh:—

“Is it in your mind, lad, to give me a overhaulin’ for bein’ careless?”

“Not a bit of it, sir,” I hastened to reply, “because in the first place I cannot believe that you overlooked the door.”

Master Staples gazed around searchingly for an instant, and then, leaning toward me, whispered cautiously:—

“Neither can I, lad. I wasn’t minded to say anything that might give you cause for trouble; but at the same time, I’m willin’ to swear that every one of them ’ere cages was locked tight as a drum before I went on deck.”



He must have seen an expression very like that of alarm on my face, for he added a moment later:—

“Perhaps it would have been more becomin’ in an old man like me to keep that kind of talk to himself; but you brought it on, so to speak. I shall overhaul the matter ’twixt now an’ midnight, of that you may be certain.”

“But how could the prisoners have opened the door?” I asked half to myself.

“That’s what we’ve got to find out. If it can be done once, it can be twice; an’ the second time might cause us trouble. They have found some way of gettin’ at the keys, for surely we’ve nobody aboard who would play the traitor. Besides, I know full well that the hatch was on an’ barred when the Frenchman struck.”

“Are you certain it hadn’t been taken off, Master Staples?” I insisted.

“Well, as to that, lad, now you speak of it, I won’t be so bloomin’ sure, for the bar had been loosened, although I didn’t give the fact much heed, ’cause some of them on the gun-deck might have come below for this thing or that.”

“Surely you ought to know whether that could



happen," I said thoughtfully. "Don't fancy I'm trying to interfere with what doesn't concern me —"

"But it does concern you, lad. You're on duty here the same as I, an' we're bound to know if there's anybody aboard disposed to play us a trick."

The more I considered the matter, the more uneasy in mind did I become; and after reflecting for a time, I asked cautiously, weighing well the words lest I should unwittingly give offence:—

"Are you willing, sir, that I should speak with Jethro Leighton, telling him what we have learned? He isn't the kind of a man to blow things, an' it may be we'll get points from him."

"Ay, lad, do as you have a mind. I've been reckonin' to look over the matter more carefully, an' am willin' Jethro should stick his fingers into the pie."

Armed with this permission, I at once went on deck where was found the old sailor at work by himself, splicing some of the running rigging which had been shot away. There was no one near him, therefore I might talk without danger of being overheard; and at once I plunged into the matter by telling him of the incident which caused me greater alarm each time I thought of it.



Jethro listened intently, never once interrupting, and when I was come to the end of the story he said reflectively : —

“If it had been almost any other man aboard than old Joe Staples, I would say he had lost his head when that whiflet of a Frenchman showed fight; but Joe ain’t the kind to get mixed up by the smell of burnin’ powder, therefore I’ll take my ’davy that he left things shipshape before comin’ on deck.”

I could see plainly that Jethro was decidedly disturbed in mind, and this fact did not tend to reassure me.

“But how do you account for the cage being open, providing, as you insist, that the prisoners must have been properly secured before the action began?”

“That’s the puzzlin’ part of it, lad; an’ ’tis what has got to be cleared up before Joe, or you, or me has any right to settle down comfortably in mind.”

“Well?” I asked impatiently, when the old man came to a full stop as if dismissing the subject.

“Well,” he repeated, “I can’t see as there is anything more to be said yet a while. ’Cordin’ to my way of thinkin’, an’ it seems to be backed up by what you’ve told me, there must be somebody on this ’ere schooner that we can’t trust.”



"A traitor!" I exclaimed.

"That's an ugly word, an' has a mighty mean sound to people situated as we are; but there's no other name for it, lad. Now hark you! Allowin' we've got among us one who is ready to go back on his shipmates an' his country, it stands to reason he would be on the lookout so's to know if anybody was gettin' suspicious, an' if he did open that door, the villain's watchin' out to see what the rest of us think of it, or if the matter is bein' talked about. We won't do any great amount of chinnin' where others can see us. Tell Joe to keep his eyes wide open; I'll do the same, an' you're to help. Betwixt the three of us, it would seem as if we ought'er hit on whatever's wrong. Joe an' I'll get together some time to-night, an' then I'll know who among us have been told off as guard, for it strikes me one of them must be the man we're lookin' for. Now go below, an' be careful who you talk with."

If I had sought this interview with Jethro believing my fears would be allayed, I should have been woefully disappointed, for on returning to Master Staples my mind was in a very disagreeable whirl.

I repeated to the old sailor, as nearly as possible, all that Jethro had said, we two crouching at the



foot of the ladder beyond earshot of the prisoners; and when I was come to the end, Master Staples said emphatically:—

“Leighton needn’t spend his time lookin’ after them as have been detailed with me to act as guard, ’cause I can answer for all hands of ’em as I would for myself. Barrin’ you an’ the lad who’s dead, I’ve served with all of ’em. If there’s any mischief afoot, it’s among the Frenchmen themselves, ’cordin’ to my way of thinkin’, therefore keep your eye out on ’em sharp; if you see any number talkin’ together like as if they didn’t want to be overheard, you can make up your mind that they’re the ones who have cooked up some plan for gettin’ at the keys after the cage doors are locked.”

“Then why wouldn’t it be a good idea for you to take charge of the keys personally? There’s no need that they be kept hanging on the stanchion.”

“I had rather they stayed there a spell longer, so we can make sure it didn’t all happen through my neglect. It’s time you was servin’ out the grub, I reckon, so go to work; an’ as Jethro says, we won’t seem to be talkin’ privately, else they’ll know we’re on to the trick an’ play shy.”

I set about my work without delay, and as may



be supposed, kept a watchful eye upon the prisoners meanwhile.

I fancied that it was possible to see on the faces of the Frenchmen an expression of hope, which had not been there when last I served out the rations; but otherwise than this there was no change. From the time of coming aboard all had seemed to be friendly, recognizing the fact that while we were at war, one country against the other, there should be no such thing as personal enmity. Two or three spoke English passably well, and these had ever before exchanged greetings with me as I went the rounds; on this night they did the same, neither speaking more nor less than usual, and wearing the ordinary expression of good feeling.

I failed to see any number of them holding private converse; but such fact did not lessen the trouble in my heart, for the very good reason that, had there been any plot afoot, all evidence of it would naturally have been suppressed when I, or the other guards, were near at hand.

The last duty of the day was to take the men on deck in companies of twelve, that they might get some slight amount of exercise. This should have been done before noon; but at that time, if you re-



member, we of the *Enterprise* were fully occupied with *La Seine*.

As a matter of course, all the guards were on duty while the men were coming up and going back, and as additional precaution, a file of marines had been stationed near the main-deck hatch.

Nothing out of the ordinary occurred, save that the time of exercise allowed the prisoners was considerably shortened, owing to the lateness of the hour.

When the last squad had gone below, I, to satisfy myself and be able to say to a certainty what was the condition of affairs in case any other singular incident occurred, personally examined the lock on each cage, and also assured myself that the keys were hanging in their accustomed place at such a distance from the bars of the prison that the men could not by any possibility come at them.

Then my tour of duty was at an end. It had been arranged that Miles and I should begin work with serving breakfast, finishing when supper had come to an end; after that we were entitled to do as we pleased until the next morning.

On this evening Jethro would hold no conversation with me lest we might give the traitor, if there was



one on board, to understand that his perfidy was discovered.

I turned into my hammock at an early hour "all standing," as the sailor's phrase is for one who goes to bed with his clothes on, for it was my intention to have a look below next morning before anything could be disturbed.

At eight bells in the morning watch I was awakened by the trampling of many feet on deck, and heard one of the men near me say that we were making ready to anchor, being arrived off the harbor of St. Kitts.

It was, as I have said, four o'clock in the morning; day was just breaking, and as yet the watch, whose time of duty expired at eight bells, was on deck.

I went into the hold, knowing beyond reasonable doubt that no one, save those whose care it was to watch the prisoners, had been below since I left the evening previous.

Master Staples was sleeping in a hammock swung at the foot of the ladder in such a manner that in order for one to descend or ascend it would be necessary to waken him.

He opened his eyes sleepily as I was forced to



swing him aside, and recognizing me, said, as he turned over to continue his slumbers:—

“You’re comin’ on duty early, lad.”

“I’m going right back, sir,” I whispered; “but want to have a look around here before any one is stirring.”

“You won’t find out what you’re wantin’ to know, for things have gone smoothly this night; of that I’ll take my oath.”

There were two lanterns burning, the flames of which hardly more than sufficed to render the darkness denser, if such could be the case; and taking one of these from its hook, prompted by some impulse which I am utterly at a loss to explain, I went directly toward where the keys of the cages were supposed to be hanging.

There were but three on the hook!

It was with difficulty I repressed an exclamation of surprise which was very nearly that of dismay; but I did succeed in holding my peace, and in order to make certain my eyes had not deceived me, took off each key in turn.

Then, lest the prisoners should understand that an important discovery had been made, I walked leisurely back toward Master Staples’s hammock, and



was on the point of awakening the old sailor again, when it seemed to me as if I heard a light shuffling of footsteps, as though some one was stealing cautiously along behind me.

Turning quickly, I held the lantern high above my head, but succeeded in distinguishing nothing because of the dense gloom.

When I turned again the same noise was perceptible; but this time I continued on toward the hammock slowly, careful lest the echo of my own footsteps should play me a trick, until there could no longer be a question but that some person was astir outside the cages.

Then I laid my hand on Master Staples's shoulder, and whispered gently in his ear:—

“There are but three keys hanging on the hook where last night I saw four. Have you had occasion to use one?”

He would have sprung up, owing to the excitement which suddenly came upon him with my announcement, but that I held him down, whispering at the same time:—

“I believe some one is moving about. Be careful to make no show of surprise.”

He remained quiet an instant, evidently listening,





"I HELD THE LANTERN HIGH ABOVE MY HEAD."







as was I; but we heard no sound in confirmation of my suspicions.

Then the old man got out of the hammock, and I, understanding his purpose, led the way, still holding the lantern to the hook where we kept the keys.

One glance there and I was like to have cried out in alarm.

Now *four* keys hung upon the hook!

Master Staples raised them one by one to assure himself they were all where they should be, and then turned upon me with an odd expression on his face.

Motioning him to follow, I went to the ladder, and from there to the gun-deck, he keeping close at my heels.

Now it was possible to speak without being overheard or observed, and I told him hurriedly of my discovery.

"You have stewed over the matter so long, lad, as to upset yourself. There must have been more than three keys on the hook when you looked at them, otherwise how did I find four?"

"That's just it, Master Staples," I said solemnly, for now I was convinced that we stood face to face with what might prove to be a serious disaster unless we speedily unravelled the mystery. "I know there



were but three keys, for I took each in my hands, and while going toward your hammock am certain that I heard footsteps a short distance behind me."

"Meanin', that you reckon the fourth key was put back into place after you counted 'em?" he said, looking searchingly into my face as if believing I had suddenly taken leave of my senses.

"Ay, Master Staples, meaning just that and nothing more. There is no chance of my having made a mistake, for I was wide awake, as you well know because of having spoken with me. The only purpose in my mind was to know whether those keys had been tampered with, and last night I observed closely how they hung on the hook in order to be able to say whether any one had removed them."

The old man remained silent for a moment, and then muttered, as if arguing with himself:—

"If it so be any one walked behind you, lad, we must find one of the cages open now."

"Where are the men who were supposed to be on duty all the time?" I asked.

"Both posted near the ladder, just forward of my hammock."

"Think you they are awake?"

"Of a verity. If it so be there are any on board



who stand watch with their eyes shut, it's a matter to be made known aft, an' I'll see to it that there's no sleepin' in duty hours by the guard below."

With this he took the lantern from my hand, for all unconsciously I had brought it with me on deck, and went hurriedly down the ladder, I following close behind.

There, when the light was flashed upon the bench which had been knocked together for the use of the guards, we saw the two sailors, each with a musket in his hand, open-eyed, and on the alert.

Master Staples glanced at me to make certain I had seen all this, and then went aft, passing each cage in turn.

So far as we could make out all the prisoners were asleep; and I satisfied myself, by pulling at the doors vigorously, that the locks yet remained fastened.

Then, when my companion would have turned to retrace his steps, I pulled him by the arm in token that we would go farther on, for this lower hold was open fore and aft, and beyond the cages was a lot of dunnage, such as spare rope, canvas, and tackle generally.

There was no search made; I hardly know why it was in my mind to look aft, because, although one



might have found a hiding-place there, it would have been a day's work to hunt him out.

There came into my mind the thought that later I would make it my business to count the prisoners behind the bars, and also learn if any of our crew were missing. That done, we would be able to say to a certainty whether there was a prisoner or traitorous Yankee walking around below.

Without giving words to such thoughts, I said to Master Staples that we could do no better than go back, and we had but arrived at the foot of the ladder when the clanking of the cable through the hawse-holes told that the *Enterprise* was come to an anchor in the bay of St. Kitts.



## CHAPTER VII

### PERPLEXITY

**I**T was not for a lad like me to make any suggestions to two sailors such as Jethro and Master Staples, unless they gave me an opportunity by discussing affairs in my presence.

As a matter of fact, I believed when the two laid their heads together to find some explanation for that which was so mysterious, I would be admitted to their council of war; but in this it appeared as if I had made a mistake.

Master Staples remained moody and silent near the foot of the ladder staring down into the darkness past the cages of the prisoners, evidently not wishing to be interrupted in his mental labors, and I, concluding it was wisest to hold my peace for the time at least, set about the morning work, forced to do double duty because of the absence of Miles.

From five o'clock until seven I had no time to spare. What with serving food and portioning out the water-supply, a lad must needs move right lively to take



care of seventy-five men, under such circumstances as I labored.

I was occupied on this morning longer than usual with the task, for the reason that I could not prevent myself from scrutinizing the faces of the Frenchmen as each took his share of the provisions, hoping I might thus find some clew to the riddle which not only annoyed, but alarmed me.

As on the previous evening, I fancied I could make out in the faces of the men a certain gleam of hope which I had not before observed; but I did not allow such possible discovery to puff me up with pride, for the very good reason that I understood full well it might all be a trick of the imagination. I was looking for a change in the faces of these people, and only because of such fact did I find it.

Most likely I would have seen nothing out of the ordinary but for the incident of the keys.

When I had come to an end of serving breakfast, there were six of our people on guard, and I concluded there was no good reason why I should not go on deck to take a view of the harbor.

The *Enterprise* was riding at anchor a long distance from the town itself, and just astern of her lay the little schooner whose crew had fought so nobly. The



stars and stripes floated from both vessels, and on the deck of the prize I could see the Frenchmen lounging about listlessly; for, as I have already said, they had given their paroles not to make any attempt at escape, and were therefore allowed full freedom of the ship.

It was the only favor which our commander was able to extend to them, and he granted it most willingly, as one brave man gives to another a token of admiration for noble qualities displayed.

The officers of this last prize, together with those from *La Sirène*, and all belonging to the *Enterprise*, were holding a confab on the quarter-deck for the purpose, as I believed, of so arranging matters that we might be freed of our prisoners.

After taking note in a listless way of all within my range of vision, I looked around in search of Master Jethro, and found him well up in the bow talking confidentially with Master Staples.

I knew full well what was the subject of the conversation, and wondered not a little that they had failed to summon me. The fact that neither looked up when I passed told of how little consequence a lad like myself was in the eyes of such old shell-backs; and yet, according to my way of thinking, I



had proven myself of considerable consequence in the matter since, but for my having gone into the hold at such an early hour, they would not have been reasonably certain, as was now the case, that some one was either playing the traitor, or that the prisoners could leave their cages at will.

During the forenoon Commander Shaw and Mr. Wadsworth went on shore to make arrangements, as I supposed, for transferring the prisoners.

They returned shortly after twelve o'clock, and an hour later we on the gun-deck learned from one of the marines that the scheme had been nipped in the bud.

The authorities of the port would allow the prisoners on board the prize which was to be sold at St. Kitts, to come ashore; and, indeed, this was from no good or ill-will of theirs, since, as I afterward came to understand, it was according to maritime law.

The matter of joining to them those taken from *La Sirène* had a stopper put to it immediately such a proposition was suggested.

We of the *Enterprise* must keep with us a hold full of Frenchmen, regardless of their discomfort or our own pleasure, until we could land them in an American port, or on board an American vessel. The authorities treated us exactly as if the United States



and France were at war with each other, even though as yet no actual declaration of hostilities had been made.

When this matter was settled, we set about repairing the damage done by the little schooner, and then a certain number of days passed much as had the time when we laid in the harbor of St. Thomas, save, perhaps, that there was not quite so much labor to be performed.

While a portion of the men worked upon the hull or the rigging of the *Enterprise*, others were putting on board fresh water and an additional store of provisions, for now that the number of mouths had been doubled, we would need a larger stock of supplies than ever before.

While we laid at anchor I spent my entire time trying to solve the mystery, and it may be as well if I set it down here at once, that I made no progress whatsoever.

If Jethro and Joe Staples had formed any plan for discovering whether we had on board a traitor, they did not make me a party to it, and this reticence caused a certain sense of injustice to spring up in my heart. That they kept their own counsel seemed to be proof that they lacked confidence in me; and as the days



wore on without my having been able to make any discoveries, I spent the greater portion of the time alone.

It is true that the two old sailors conversed with me as before, hesitating not to speak freely of the problem we were eager to solve; but withheld what to me would have been most satisfactory — an outline of their own plan of operations.

It is not well that I attempt to set down here a detailed account of the long, weary days spent in the harbor of St. Kitts, because a recital of all that was done would afford but little interest to any save those who were as much concerned in clearing up the mystery as was I.

It must suffice to say that, although constantly on the watch, I failed in hearing the slightest word to betoken that some one was at liberty in the hold. In fact, I hardly expected anything of the kind, since, having counted the prisoners half a dozen times over, it was learned that none were missing, and of our own crew every man could be accounted for on that particular morning when I had been so seriously disturbed.

We laid at St. Kitts ten days, and during that time the crew and officers of *La Seine* had been set ashore, while the little craft herself was being put in trim to be sold.



Then came the day for which I had longed, when we put to sea once more, and I had succeeded in persuading myself that there was in fact nothing whatsoever in the way of a mystery among us. I must have made a mistake in counting the keys; the footsteps which I heard behind me on that evening when we arrived in the harbor was only a trick of the imagination, and Master Staples had overlooked the lock on the cage when he made ready for action.

Such was my conclusion, and Jethro agreed with me. Because nothing else out of the ordinary had been seen or heard, we believed that all which went before were fancies on our part.

It had become necessary for our peace of mind that we arrive at some such decision, and we diligently tried to believe it was the true solution.

It was a relief to be at sea once more; to hear the wind humming among the cordage, and to feel the gallant little schooner leaping from surge to surge like some living thing.

Now we were on the lookout for more prizes, feeling confident, because of our previous good luck, that there were other French colors to be lowered before our guns.

It was as if Miles Partlett had never been aboard; no one spoke his name, and I had had so much in my



mind regarding the possibility of there being a traitor among us, that I had almost ceased to think of him.

One of the crew had been detailed in his stead to assist me with the feeding of the prisoners, who were given more liberty now than formerly; and by the time we were three days out from port, affairs on board the *Enterprise* had settled down into the usual routine.

It was on the morning of the fifth day after leaving St. Kitts, and we were to leeward of Gaudaloupe running free. For six and thirty hours the wind had blown half a gale, raising such a sea as forced the *Enterprise* to shove her nose into the hollows of the surges until the spray was flung from bow to stern.

Despite the discomfort of such sailing, it was a day to be enjoyed; the sharp humming of the wind through the rigging, the churning of the waves beneath our cutwater, and the buoyant rising and falling of our little craft was so exhilarating that one forgot the inconvenience of being wet to the skin.

Then came that cry from the lookout which those who hunt men upon the ocean know full well—that announcement which electrifies the crew, causing the blood to bound until their veins are on the point of bursting.



"Sail ho!"

"Where away?"

"Three points to leeward, sir."

"What do you make her to be?"

"She looks like a topsail schooner, sir, and has much the air of a cruiser."

Then a quick order to the helmsman; a swinging off of the schooner's bow; another hail from the lookout to tell that we were on the right course, and again was the *Enterprise* in hot pursuit, her crew hoping the stranger might prove to be an enemy, and fearing lest they were doomed to disappointment.

Now it was I thought more deeply of Miles Partlett than since the hour it seemed certain he had been killed; for this was the time when that unfortunate lad's courage would have begun to fail him, and he be making ready to hide himself against the danger, much as does an ostrich when he plunges his head into the sand.

Fortunately for me I had come to realize that it is a waste of emotion to tremble before being sent to quarters, for there is many a slip 'twixt the sighting of a strange sail and the capturing of a prize.

I was obliged to attend to my work of feeding the men in the hold before we had run the chase hull



down; but when I had performed my duties, and the prisoners were being taken on deck for exercise, it was possible to see the stranger with the naked eye.

"What is she?" I asked of Master Jethro.

"A schooner, an' a Frenchman, 'cordin' to the belief of Commander Shaw. She seems to be a small cruiser somewhere near our own weight, or less; rather smaller, I should say, or else she'd have had the politeness to let us come alongside without spendin' so much time in chasin' her."

"In case we come to action, I suppose I am to go to my old post, Master Jethro?"

"Why not?"

"I thought perhaps I might be obliged to help look after the prisoners."

"You can trust Joe Staples for that, and with two others he should have enough to help him."

"Unless our mysterious friend in the hold takes a hand again," I added, harking back to the mystery despite myself, whereat the old sailor put on a look of injury.

"I thought we had agreed to let that matter drop," he said gruffly. "It was a mistake from beginnin' to end, an' will do more harm than good if we keep it in mind. I've known of a ship's company bein' knocked



all out of shape by dwellin' on some such foolish thing as that. Take my advice, lad, an' don't think of it again. We're like to go into action pretty soon, unless it so be them as are ahead of us show the white feather too quick, an' a little dance of that kind will put your mind in a more healthy trim."

"I had almost forgotten it during the past week," I protested, feeling rather ashamed because Jethro seemed to think it necessary I should be reminded of what had evidently been no less than folly.

"You are doin' well, lad. Our business is to hunt for Frenchmen, an' when we get off the chase so far as to go snoopin' 'round for ghosts, it's a sign we're growin' foolish. I'll admit there was one spell when I got kind er creepy over it; but as I said to Joe Staples, 'Where's the use, Joe, to hunt 'round for shadders, when all you've got to do is to run across a frog-eater about twice the size of the *Enterprise* if you want real trouble?' Consequently Joe, he agreed with me, so from that day to this we've held our tongues; an' a man with half an eye can see that it was the wisest thing to do. There hasn't been any show of a ghost since we struck St. Kitts, an' if we had one aboard, he most likely slipped ashore at that port."



There was no good reason why Jethro should dwell so long on the subject, and it irritated me because he did so. I was not a child to be frightened by my own shadow, and surely both these old sailors had had proof enough that I could stand my ground when really serious danger threatened.

However, I refrained from giving words to that which was in my mind, because ahead of us was what we had good reason to believe might prove an enemy, and one forgets to think of mysteries when death comes aboard his craft.

Jethro did not seek to detain me in conversation. There was nothing in particular he had to say now when the excitement of the chase was hot upon us all, and the old man had eyes for nothing save that fleck of white which rose and fell on the surges so far in advance.

Before it was time for me to serve out the evening meal, we were so near aboard the chase as to make out, with reasonable certainty, her fighting force, as well as her nationality.

She was a small French schooner carrying, so far as we could see, no more than six guns; but the crew of the *Enterprise* had already learned that even so small a craft as that might be able to show her teeth



in the most terrible fashion, and no one ventured to declare that she would strike her colors immediately we were within gunshot, for *La Seine* had taught us a different lesson.

It was enough, however, that unless some accident occurred she would soon be our prize, and although we were taking small fry, it was quite as much, perhaps, as a schooner the size of the *Enterprise* had a right to expect.

The chase was a good sailer, and when the cooks were ready to send the prisoners their supper, the schooner had so much the lead of us that there was little danger but that I could finish my work before we had come within hailing distance.

Those in the hold must have realized that there was an action close at hand, because of the fact that all the guards aided me in dealing out the food and water, and each man hurried through the task as if it was of vital importance he should complete it in the shortest possible space of time.

Then when I announced to Joe Staples that all the prisoners had been cared for, he motioned me to follow him as he went from one cage to another, unlocking and relocking the doors in order to make certain they were fast.



This done, he hung the keys on the hook which was driven into a stanchion fully twenty feet away from the nearest prison cage, whispering to me as he did so:—

“Now it is not alone my word that must be taken in case there is any tamperin’ with these ’ere locks. Mind you, lad, I’m not lookin’ for anything queer to happen, because, accordin’ to my figgerin’, an’ Jethro Leighton is of the same opinion, if there was anybody at liberty in this ’ere hold when we run into St. Kitts, he found a chance to slip ashore. Howsomever, there will be two witnesses to the fact that we have left our men in good shape.”

“Are all the guards to be sent to quarters?” I asked, surprised that such a large number of men should be left alone, even though they were confined in stout cages.

“Ay, lad, that’s the order I got from Mr. Wadsworth two hours ago. We’re to lock all the doors, an’ then bar the hatch. After that, if any mischief is done, them as are doin’ it will find they’ve got a hard job before ’em to get further than the hold.”

Then the old sailor commanded the men who had been acting as sentinels, to go up the ladder. He



followed, and I came directly behind him, stopping near the hatch combing to look back.

Everything was apparently as it should be. The two lanterns swung from the deck-beams, illuminating the place only sufficiently to enable one to see its general outlines, and the prisoners were, as might have been supposed, somewhat restless since they knew, because of our movements, that we were close aboard one of their countrymen.

"If anything down there has been disturbed when you take off the hatch, Master Staples, then I'll say that the hold should be searched thoroughly."

"An' that's what shall be done, if it so happens we find the least thing out of place; but I'm tellin' you for the truth, that this time, when we can make no mistake, you'll not find hide nor hair missin'."

When we two came on the gun-deck we found the crew at quarters, for our commander was not to be caught napping again because his chase happened to be a very small craft, and the men were chaffing among themselves about our taking so many precautions when, as one of them said, we had only to "clap the falls of the long-boat fore and aft the stranger in order to hoist her inboard."

"That's what you might have done to the last



Frenchman we run afoul of, an' then found that you'd taken hold of a cat that knew how to scratch in fine style," Master Staples said with a laugh. "How goes the chase?"

"We're well aboard now, an' likely to hear an order for the first gun to be fired before many minutes."

"Does the enemy appear to have much of a crew?"

"Somewhere between fifty an' sixty, so it is said," one of the gunners replied, and at that moment a midshipman bawled down through the hatch:—

"Number 1 gun ahoy! Pitch a ball over the Frenchman!"

"Ay, ay, sir," came the cheery response, as the old shell-back went down on his knees to sight the piece, and a moment later one could feel the recoil of the gun as the report rang out, seeming to fill the entire deck with noise, after which the pungent odor of powder came rolling backward, stifling and intoxicating.

That which followed came all so suddenly that it is not possible for me to set down of my own knowledge any details.

It was as if our No. 1 gun had but just spoken



when a shot crashed through the timbers between the first and second ports, sending splinters in every direction, and I saw three men stretched out on the deck, bleeding and gasping.

Then some one, I know not who, ordered me to turn to in the work of bringing ammunition, and I set about the task more from force of habit than because I was conscious of my movements.

When we opened fire on *La Seine*, there was pity in my mind that a vessel of our size should be attacking one so much smaller; but now, when the circumstances were similar, I ceased to feel any sympathy with the weaker force.

In the previous case we had attempted to close our hand upon a hornet, and felt its sting. We were now evidently doing the same thing, and again came into my mind that fiendish desire to know whether we were working more harm upon them than they on us, for the cries of the wounded men plunged me into an excess of savage desire.

“Another crew of brave Frenchmen!” I heard some one shout, and then came the reply, with a laugh that had in it nothing of mirth:—

“Ay, that’s what we’ve struck. It must be that all the cowards were waiting for us early in the



cruise, an' now we'll be called upon to pay well for whatsoever we get. Good for you, Zenas! That last shot cut close to the heart of the foremast."

By this time we who worked on the gun-deck were enveloped in clouds of smoke so dense that one could hardly see half a dozen paces in advance, and as I was running forward with two 6-pound shot in my arms, I struck my foot upon a half-dead man, fell, and ploughed my way through a pool of blood from which arose a salty odor that seemed to mingle well with the fumes of the powder.

The shot rolled to leeward; I failed to see them when I searched with my eyes. Time was too precious to admit of hunting, and I ran below to get a second lot, heeding not the fact that from my hair nearly to my toes I was covered with the life fluid of some brave man.

Later during the action, it is impossible to say exactly when, but after I had fallen over my wounded shipmate, Jethro Leighton caught me by the shirt collar as I would have passed him, and cried in a tone almost of agony:—

"You are wounded, lad! Get into the cockpit at once. There's no reason why you should be staggerin' 'round here in this shape!"



He dragged me forward as he spoke, and I had great difficulty in persuading him that it was not my blood, but another's, which gave me such a hideous aspect; but when the old man became convinced that I was uninjured, he clasped me to himself in very joy, as if I was one whom he dearly loved.

The Frenchmen fought like tigers; their six guns were discharged so rapidly that it seemed as if there must have been twice that number on board.

Looking through one of the port-holes in order to get a breath of fresh air, it seemed to me as if her deck was literally covered with the dead and wounded, while ours was little better.

Nearby where Jethro Leighton was stationed lay a lifeless body over which some one had flung a spare hammock, and it appeared to me as if the men were continually carrying their shipmates below where the surgeons were at work.

That breath of fresh air came near proving disastrous to me. In stopping to inhale it I had freed myself from the grasp of the fever, and found time to realize what was going on around me.

The scene of horror, the crashing of timbers, and the roaring of guns which spoke so loudly of death, brought me to the very verge of cowardice.



I believe that in five minutes more I should have run shrieking and with covered eyes to some hiding-place, even as Miles Partlett had done, thereby disgracing myself forever in the eyes of those who looked upon me as a shipmate who had been tried and proven.

Fortunately, however, some one was needed just at that moment to aid in carrying a poor fellow below whose leg was shattered above the knee, and I offered my services with the cowardly thought that by so doing I should escape the horror, if not the danger, which surrounded me.

While we walked the length of the deck, I carrying the suffering man's shoulders, and he who was my companion for the time being supporting the remainder of the body, there came into my mind the thought which I had so often tried to impress upon Miles, that one place on shipboard had in it quite as much of danger as another, and he who stood at his post was no nearer death than he who fled to hide his head in terror.

This thought gave me strength to hide the timorousness which was rapidly creeping into my heart, and then, as we came to that room where the surgeons were at work, I was nigh to fainting like a woman.



Five wounded men were being cared for, or waiting their turn at that terrible table where the two surgeons stood with gleaming knives, cutting and hacking at the quivering flesh as if with savage eagerness to cause more pain, and I reeled to and fro, like a person drunken, under the horrors of the situation.

One of the surgeons, whose hands and arms were reeking with the blood of this human shambles, steadied me lest I fall, and said, as he gently pushed me outside the door:—

“You haven’t yet had experience enough, lad, to come into the cockpit. Don’t blame yourself for turning white around the mouth, for I’ve seen men who had taken part in twenty battles collapse when they saw a place like this.”

I had been so near the very verge of cowardice that the reaction sent me in the opposite direction, and straightway I became inflamed with passion, burning to avenge upon the enemy the suffering which I had witnessed.

Running to the gun-deck at full speed, looking straight before me and half closing my eyes lest I should see other sights which would unman me, I set about such work as came to hand until once



more I lost all reckoning of time, all idea of movement, all thought of danger.

From this waking dream, for I can call that condition of mind into which I had again been plunged by no other name, I was aroused by the sudden cessation of noise, and the cheers of my shipmates, which told that at last the gallant little Frenchman had hauled down her colors.

A few moments later we knew that this last prize was *La Citoyenne*, a 6-gun schooner carrying fifty-seven men.

She had held out to the very last moment, fighting so long as the most sanguine could see a ray of hope, and when finally she struck her colors, the list of casualties amounted to four killed and ten wounded.

On board the *Enterprise* one marine was killed, and seven seamen more or less severely injured.

If blood was of any value, then in truth had we paid for these two small schooners a most extravagant price.



## CHAPTER VIII

### PROOFS OF TREACHERY

THERE was in my mind when the plucky little *La Citoyenne* struck, the hope that I might be called away as one of the prize crew, and exactly why this wish came into my heart it would be difficult to explain.

There was no good reason for me to desire a change of quarters; the crew of the *Enterprise* to a man were as kindly disposed toward me as I could have asked; but yet something—call it the spirit of adventure, if you will—spoke within me, saying that it would be a fine experience to take passage on a vessel recently captured.

This last prize was a smart little craft, and there was no reason for despising her sailing qualities simply because the *Enterprise* had run her down so quickly.

Our schooner was an exception to the average craft, and it did not need that any vessel should be lying at anchor in order for us to overhaul her.



I was overhanging the rail with some such thoughts in my mind, watching the scene of activity and of distress before me, when a hand was laid heavily on my shoulder, and, turning quickly, I saw Master Staples.

"I thought the agreement was that you were to be the first to go into the hold with me, so we could take our 'davys that the ghost had been laid," the old man said not unkindly; and I replied by first announcing my intention of going with him, and afterward giving words to the thoughts which had come into my mind as I gazed at the prize.

"You want to keep all such idees as that out of your head, my boy. Unless direct orders are given for you to make one of a prize crew, stick to your own ship, an' stick hard."

"What do you mean?" I asked in surprise, for the old man had spoken more forcibly and emphatically to me than it seemed the subject warranted.

"I made one of a prize crew not so many years ago, and it was enough to sicken me of the business. Take, say, five men,—which are as many as our commander will allow ought to run this 'ere prize into port,—an' put 'em on deck with fifty or sixty below hatches, the five to do all the work, of clearin' up after



the action, searchin' out for skulkers who may turn dangerous, or otherwise humpin' themselves in fine style. Let the wind come 'round with a slant that sends you away from the port you're countin' on makin', givin' you three weeks or more of nigger's work, an' then let some bloomin' Frenchman come along an' recapture you. I won't say as all prize crews get the same treatment, because they don't; but when you go aboard of a craft like that one, you're takin' the chances of that much work with good possibility of bein' brought up with a sharp turn in jail. No prize crews for you or me," the old man added, shaking his head vigorously, and dragging me like a culprit by the collar of my shirt across the deck.

"If you'll let up a bit, I can do my own walking," I said with a laugh, for to be handled ever so kindly by Joe Staples was much like being hugged by a bear. He had no idea of his own strength, and a love-tap from him would come near to knocking a fellow senseless.

When we came to the hatchway of the lower hold, there was no thought in my mind that we should find matters below other than as they had been left. What with the action, and the talk Master Staples



had been making regarding a prize crew, I had almost forgotten that there had ever been anything in the hold which we might call a mystery; and as the hatch was raised, I sighed at the idea of being forced to go below, thus shutting myself out from the light of the new day which was just breaking.

Half a second later, however, I came to a very decided realization that something of greatest importance had occurred in this portion of the schooner; for as we raised the hatch there came to our ears a noise as of men scurrying to and fro seeking a hiding-place, and I looked up at the old sailor in alarm, for of a verity this was no ghostly affair, but something of flesh and blood.

Master Staples had worn a cutlass during the action, and this was still hanging at his belt. Loosening the weapon in its scabbard, and without waiting to call for assistance as another man would who knows that seventy or eighty men may be waiting to attack him, the old man slid, rather than walked, down the ladder.

I followed his example, forgetting the possible danger in my desire to see, at the same time he did, what had occurred during our absence.

Like a flash of lightning from a clear sky came



back to my mind all the fears of treachery which had been driven away during the past few days, and at that instant I suddenly came to believe that more than one of our men were in league with the enemy.

When we two stood below, the prisoners were quiet as usual, and not a sound could be heard betokening mischief.

The lanterns still swung gently to and fro from the beams, and to all appearances there had been no change whatsoever in this quarter of the schooner. But for the fact of our knowing beyond a peradventure that all these men had, a few moments previously, been moving about at will, I would have said of a verity that we were fools to have fancied they might escape from their prisons.

Master Staples, moving quickly with the hope of catching some of the men at their tricks, hurriedly seized one of the lanterns, and, holding it high above his head, went from cage to cage, while an exclamation of dismay burst from my lips as I followed him, for two of the prison doors were unlocked and open a few inches.

This time there was no chance for a mistake. Both the old sailor and myself had seen to it beyond a doubt that the bolts were fastened, and now no



less than forty of the prisoners might have rushed out when only Joe Staples and myself were there as a bar to their progress toward the gun-deck.

I turned to the hook on which the keys were hung, and there found the four as if they had never been disturbed.

In my excited frame of mind it was much like touching something from another world to take down those iron tools, for now was the mystery floating in thick upon us, as the fog envelops a ship at sea, and I trembled so violently with an undefined emotion as to be well-nigh incapable of movement.

Master Staples took the keys from my hands, hurriedly locked the doors, and then set about making certain that all the prisoners were where they should be.

After some difficulty we counted the men as they obediently ranged themselves around the sides of the cages, and when this had been done, the old sailor said with a long-drawn sigh:—

“They’re all here, lad; but how it has come about that these ’ere doors can be unlocked by them beats me!”

“Of course we’ve got a traitor among our crew,” I cried in the tone of one who says that which he



hopes may be true, but doubts it, for I was struggling to the utmost of my mental strength to prevent myself from believing that there was something supernatural about this whole matter; and the old man heightened the terrible mystery for me when he said decidedly:—

“I could come pretty near takin’ an oath that all of our men are true. Jethro Leighton an’ I have reckoned ’em over an’ over agin without comin’ across a single man who might be willin’ to deliver up this ’ere schooner to the enemy by such black-hearted treachery.”

“But it is certain some one did it, Master Staples, unless you’re counting that there is a ghost in the hold.”

“An’ if there was?” the old man cried, turning upon me furiously. “Do you mean to say as how things that ain’t flesh an’ blood can come around unlockin’ doors an’ playin’ sich like pranks?”

“It has been done,” I persisted, like a simple; “and now we know there could have been no mistake before, when you believed the cages were fastened securely.”

Joe Staples rubbed his ear vigorously, swung the lantern around until we could see that there were no skulkers nearby the cages, and then stared at me so fixedly that it seemed much as if he was asking



whether I had any hand in this matter which was of such vital importance to all on board the *Enterprise*.

"Why do you look at me in such a manner?" I cried, becoming almost frightened.

"I'm tryin' to figger out what's to be done, lad," the old man replied; and by the tone of his voice I knew he was plunged as deep in trouble as myself. "Jethro Leighton an' I turned this thing over an' over; but we couldn't make head or tail of it, an' now has come the time when we've got to call in others to help us out; for, hark you! suppose the *Enterprise* was in action two or three hours, as is like to be the case any day, these 'ere frog-eaters would have time to do a heap of mischief."

"But who can you go to?"

"To one of the officers, of course, as is our duty. Now if it so be we can get Mr. Wadsworth's ear, I'll be able to chin with him better'n I could with the commander. Pass the word for all hands detailed as prison guard to come below."

It was necessary to do something more than "pass the word" in order to bring our men to their posts once more, for all hands were deeply engaged putting the prize into a seaworthy condition; and I was forced to run hither and thither at the expense of a



good half hour's time before finding all who had been drafted under the command of Master Staples.

When I stood on the upper deck once more, it was possible to see what our people were doing. The French schooner had been considerably cut up in the rigging, and the carpenters were at work plugging the shot-holes in her hull.

Evidently the able-bodied of her crew had been put under the hatches, for not a frog-eater could be seen, and our surgeons yet remained on board of her, as well they might when it was a case of attending to ten wounded men.

As nearly as I could judge, *La Citoyenne* would be gotten under way in a couple of hours at the longest, and then would come the time for our people to patch up the injuries received by the *Enterprise*; for she showed many a plain mark of the Frenchman's claws.

I went below again, after making certain that all the guards had obeyed the summons, and gave to Master Staples the information which I had gained.

"It's a case of settlin' this 'ere matter off hand, an' no shilly-shallyin'," the old sailor said decidedly. "As I figger it, we've got precious little time to lose; an' now you an' I must get speech with Lieutenant Wadsworth in short order."



"He is in charge of the work on board the prize just now."

"Then we must go where he is, for I'm not of a mind to let this thing hang in the wind any longer."

Master Staples gave strict orders to the guard that they keep a sharp lookout over the prisoners, enjoining upon the men not to leave the hold under any circumstances whatsoever until his return, and then he and I went above.

More than one called us to lend a hand at this job or that when we appeared, and but for the fact that my companion had been relieved of all other duty save that of guarding the prisoners, it might have been many hours before we could have held a private conversation with the lieutenant.

As it was, however, Joe Staples knew his duty and his privileges equally well, and turning a deaf ear to every call, he walked boldly to the quarter-deck where stood the first lieutenant.

"I'd like to have a word with Mr. Wadsworth, sir, in regard to the prisoners," he said, saluting with more than ordinary ceremony, whereupon the officer replied curtly:—

"Our boats are alongside. Use one of them. Mr. Wadsworth is on board the prize."



We went over the rail into the smallest boat, and to me the short trip from one vessel to the other was full of danger, for our little craft rose and fell on the heavy surges until it seemed certain we must be swamped when trying to run alongside *La Citoyenne*.

This portion of the work was but child's play for Master Staples, and soon we were on the quarter of the prize, bowing and scraping before the second lieutenant.

"What is it?" he asked sharply. "We've got a handful of work here, and there's no time for foolishness."

"If it please you, sir, this ain't foolishness by a long shot," Joe Staples began gravely, and the expression on his face told the officer that the old man had something of import to impart, whereupon he gave ear, neglecting the work on hand for the moment.

Hurriedly, but yet going into all the details, Master Staples explained that which troubled us, bringing the story down to the present moment.

When he had finished, it was the lieutenant's turn to look grave, and after a brief pause he said:—

"There has been some carelessness among the men, and you have imagined the rest."



“Not a bit of it, sir, beggin’ your pardon. This lad an’ I unlocked an’ locked every door before we went into action, an’ when we two left the hold everything was as it should be. That we can swear to, seein’s how we made preparations to find out whether there could be a mistake.”

“And the prisoners showed no disposition to make trouble?”

“Not what you might call real trouble, sir. They acted excited like, an’ I’m allowin’ that if we’d given whomsoever planned the prank a chance to set ’em all free, the crew of the *Enterprise* would have been in a serious kind of a muss.”

Again Mr. Wadsworth reflected a few seconds, and then asked sharply:—

“Why didn’t you go to the commander with this story?”

“Well, you see it’s like this, sir; I could talk to you as was needed, but didn’t know how to come ’round Commander Shaw.”

“So you think it’s easier to spin me a yarn that has nothing in it than him?” Mr. Wadsworth said laughingly.

“But this ’ere is no yarn, sir; it’s a reg’lar official report I’m makin’.”



"Then go to the commander with my compliments, and say to him that he'll oblige me by listening patiently to all you've got to say. I'll answer for it, Staples, that he won't choke you off till you've wagged your tongue freely."

With that Mr. Wadsworth turned once more to his duties of making repairs on the schooner, and we clambered into our boat again, the wind carrying us swiftly down on the *Enterprise*, where it was necessary a couple of our men should help us in coming alongside, else we might have been swamped.

Grown bold by the advice of Mr. Wadsworth, Staples went straight to the quarter-deck, took off his hat, and there stood waiting until the commander should see fit to speak with him.

"Well, what is it, my man?" Mr. Shaw asked when he had time to notice us two insignificant members of his crew.

"Mr. Wadsworth's compliments, sir, an' he asks that you listen, with whatsoever of patience is possible, to the official report we have come to make regardin' the prisoners."

"Nothing serious, I presume," Mr. Shaw said, looking everywhere but at us, thus showing that the "official report" had failed to attract his attention.



"It is serious, sir, an' like to be of more importance even than the fittin' of yonder prize, for there's treachery aboard."

Master Staples spoke so emphatically and yet gravely, that our commander was really startled, as I could tell by the expression which came over his face; and now fixing his eyes upon the old man for the first time, he asked in a low tone:—

"Is it something which must be said in private, my man?"

"Yes, sir, an' it please you."

"Then come below."

We went into the after cabin, which was in a state of fine confusion, owing to the fact that everything had been cleared away in order that both the stern guns might be used, and I could see but little difference between the quarters of the commander and our own.

Here were rough beams, as on the gun-deck. There was no attempt at beautifying the saloon, as would have been found on a merchant vessel. Every fitting was of the plainest, and at that moment I had a greater respect for our commander than ever before; for until now I fancied him living in the finest style, while his crew was forced to put up with anything.



“Now tell me your story, my man, and as quickly as possible, without hurrying over any of the important points.”

Master Staples set about the matter much less fluently than when he was talking with Lieutenant Wadsworth, because the presence of the commander served to act as a check upon his tongue; but he succeeded in giving a fairly good idea of that which had happened, turning every now and then to me, as if believing it necessary I should corroborate all his statements by word of mouth.

There was no disposition on the part of our captain to laugh at or cast discredit upon the statements made. One would have said from his appearance that he looked upon the matter quite as seriously as did we, and showed by the questions asked that it was his belief some person other than a member of our crew, or one of the prisoners from *La Sirène*, who was doing the mischief.

“Did you make anywhere near a thorough search of the hold?” he asked, and the old sailor replied:—

“That couldn't have been done by two, sir. There is such a lot of dunnage that a dozen men wouldn't be able to do the work properly in any short time.”



"Have you examined the bars of the cages to make certain one of them can't be slipped aside?"

"Ay, sir. I've had my hand on every bit of wood that goes to make up the prisons, an' I'm sure all is as it should be."

"Then it stands to reason that we have a skulker among the dunnage. Most likely a boy, who wasn't reckoned in as one of the prisoners, slipped on board with them and found a hiding-place."

"It may be, sir," Master Staples said thoughtfully, "but I stood at the foot of the ladder when the Frenchmen were sent below, an' would be willin' to take my solemn 'davy that not one of 'em got aft of the cages."

"See to it that from this moment a stricter watch than usual be kept. Have not less than four men on duty all the time, and swing five or six battle-lanterns so that there may be no shadows for a skulker to hide in. As soon as we are in condition to lay our course again, I'll have the hold thoroughly overhauled."

With this Mr. Shaw, who had been seated at his desk, arose, and we took it as a signal that the interview was at an end, therefore went on deck without delay; and once there the old man said to me, in a tone



which told of his satisfaction at the result of the interview with the commander:—

“That’s the kind of a man to be in charge of a craft like ours! He don’t get it into his head first pop that you’re tryin’ to give him guff, or laugh at a man when he has good reason to be mixed up in his mind. Now we can rest easy, Paul, for the business will be attended to in short order.”

Then we went below, and Master Staples repeated the orders which had been given, thus putting on duty, even at a time when men were needed to get the ship into condition, twelve of those who might, perhaps, have been better employed elsewhere, although it is not for one like me to say so.

Now I was comfortable in mind once more, since the commander had taken charge of the business, for there seemed to me little fear that anything serious could take place.

At such times as I was not engaged playing the part of waiter to the frog-eaters, I watched the progress of the work on both vessels; and at a late hour that night was the prize got under way for St. Kitts, where, so some of the marines said, we were to follow her without unnecessary delay.

Until midnight our seamen were busy as bees over-



hauling the running rigging, while the carpenters patched and plugged till every shot-hole was properly stopped, and then the starboard watch was sent below, I, who had remained on deck with the idea that even the services of a boy might be needed, following them.

Before I had gotten into my hammock old Jethro collared me, saying as he walked well aft, dragging me behind him to a spot where we might converse without being overheard:—

“I’m countin’ on havin’ a bit of a jaw with you, lad, seein’s how it ain’t convenient to come at Joe Staples. Tell me what took you over to the prize about noon.”

There was no reason why I should not answer this question inasmuch as Jethro knew what had previously happened, and I gave him an account of all that had been done and said by Master Staples and myself since *La Citoyenne* struck her colors.

“So the ghosts have come below agin, eh?” he said half to himself, and with the air of a man who tries to conceal his fears, whereat I made answer promptly:—

“There can be no ghosts in this business, Master Jethro, as you must understand. It was a real, live man who unlocked those doors, of that we may be certain.”

“But I’d rather count it a ghost than think we had a



traitor among us. An' when it comes to that, lad, I tell you there's nobody on board who'd play sich a trick. Joe Staples an' I went over the names of all the crew, an' I'd be willin' to vouch for every mother's son of 'em. We made sure the prisoners couldn't slip out, for a cat wouldn't be able to make her way between them 'ere bars, so it *must* be a ghost of some kind."

"Very well," I said sleepily; "have it as you will, but I'm thinking the commander will come nearer the truth of the story when the hold has been searched."

Jethro remained silent an instant, as if in deep thought; and just when I believed he was about to make some sharp reply, thinking perhaps I had spoken too pertly, we were startled by a sudden outburst of shouts and yells from the lower hold.

"Your ghosts are at it again!" I cried, running forward toward the hatchway and at the same time seizing a cutlass from the arms stand near the foremast.

Then I tumbled, rather than walked, down the ladder, finding myself immediately in the most confusing squabble that ever a man could wish to see.

It was as if the lower hold was filled with men who were fighting their way desperately toward the hatchway, and held in check only by a few whom I understood were the guards.



There was no need for me to ask questions, and indeed had I been eager to do so, no one there could have stopped sufficiently long to have answered them, because each of our fellows was fighting literally for his life against that infuriated throng of Frenchmen armed with missiles of various kinds, such as belaying-pins, fragments of plank, spare pump-handles, and, in fact, a specimen of almost everything which could have been found amid the dunnage.

If it was a ghost who had unloosed that throng of fighters, then must it, or he, have spent many hours getting together the collection of odds and ends which served as weapons. And effective weapons they were, too, in that narrow space where Yankees and Frenchmen were crowded so closely together that one could hardly raise his arms sufficiently high to wield a cutlass.

I had dropped into the midst of the conflict with a cutlass in my hand; but before it was possible to find standing-room the weapon was swept from my grasp, and during a certain fraction of time, for I could not say whether one minute or five passed, it seemed as if I must literally be trampled under foot.

Our people were standing with their backs to the ladder, while the Frenchmen were doing their best to



get possession of this exit before those on deck could come to the rescue.

Without really being conscious of doing so, I counted in one glance the number of guards who were striving against the enemy, and found but eight.

Four must already have fallen, and the odds were so great against us that it seemed to me certain the frog-eaters would carry everything before them by sheer force of numbers at the next onrush.

I saw Master Staples thrust here and there with his cutlass, and shout to encourage his shipmates:—

“Give them the point of the steel, lads, and don’t try to strike a blow, for it’s impossible!”

As the men acted upon this suggestion there came shrieks of pain mingled with savage shouts of anger, and here and there I saw the enemy recoil as one or more of their number fell back lifeless, the crimson fluid spurting from their breasts in forceful jets that sent the blood to the deck timbers above.

One of the lanterns had been overturned, and, breaking, the oil had poured out on the planking, burning there so fiercely as to threaten a conflagration.

The salty odor of blood came to my nostrils; I was suffocated by the foul air which had been inhaled



again and again by the occupants of the hold; crushed in that tightly packed mob until it was as if every joint had been dislocated, and unable to make the slightest move by way of defence, because I had neither weapons nor an opportunity to use my fists.

It was a scene well calculated to madden one, and while striving to force myself out from among the thin line of our crew, I thought that no punishment could be devised which would be too great for the demon who had set in motion this pandemonium.

Then it was that I heard a sharp cry of command from above; I saw those of our fellows who were attempting to descend the ladder, leap here or there, regardless of whom they struck, and descending until his feet were near to touching my shoulders, stood the master of the *Enterprise* — Commander Shaw.

“Pass down the loaded muskets, you men on the gun-deck!” he shouted, and lowering his head that those who were struggling with the escaping prisoners might the better hear, he cried:—

“Empty the weapons as soon as they are sent down, and then pass them up again to be reloaded! Make certain of your aim, and let every bullet find its mark!”



Even as he spoke I could see the butts of the muskets lowered, and when our men reached up to grasp them, the prisoners, understanding that there was no longer a possibility of successful resistance, melted away like dew before the sun as they ran, each to his particular cage.

The uprising was at an end; but it had cost human lives, as I could see by the lifeless bodies on the deck, around which crimson pools showed dully under the faint gleam of the lanterns.

“Make fast the doors, Staples, and once that has been done, bring the keys to me. Carry the dead on deck for burial, and send those who are wounded into the cockpit.”

Then the master of the *Enterprise* ascended the ladder, while we were left amid a scene of carnage which was more terrible than if it had been brought about in the heat of an engagement, wondering what demon had wrought the mischief, and knowing full well that he who skulked in the hold was responsible for it all.



## CHAPTER IX

MILES PARTLETT

THE scene in the hold when the attempt at escape had been checked, was sickening in the extreme, and I observed on turning my face toward the cages in order to shut out the view of what lay on the deck, that the prisoners themselves were shocked by the result of their worse than useless struggle.

Two of our people had severe wounds about the head caused by clubs; five of the Frenchmen lay dead, each with a cutlass-thrust in his breast, and four were seriously disabled.

The planking near about the foot of the ladder was slippery with blood, and the odor was sickening. In order to hold myself together, as it were, I was forced to go aft, and there face the black darkness of the hold while our people were clearing away the terrible tokens of the conflict.

The wounded shrieked aloud in agony as they were half hoisted, half lifted through the narrow hatchway, and those who had received a sword-thrust were like



to bleed to death before they could be gotten into the cockpit, because of the rough handling necessary to get them out of the place.

The shrill cries and the groans pierced my ears until I trembled with cowardice, and the cold drops of fear, like unto perspiration, literally bathed me in moisture.

It was the most horrible situation in which a lad could be placed, and, above all my anguish of mind, I prayed that he who had been the means of bringing about this encounter — that skulker and traitor in the hold — might suffer all his life long what I was then suffering.

I little dreamed on whose head I was invoking so much and such dire misery.

At last, and when it seemed to me as if the day must already have dawned, all vestiges of the fray had been cleared away, save here and there the dark stains on the planks which neither soap, nor holystone, nor water would remove — stains which told where a human being had passed from this world into the next.

Master Staples did not call upon me to lend a hand while this horrible work was being performed, and I was very grateful for his consideration, since, had I



been summoned, all must have known by the trembling of my limbs and the pallor of my face, that I was at heart even as cowardly as Miles Partlett.

Not until the terrible task was finished did the old sailor seek me out, and then he said, laying a friendly hand upon my shoulder :—

“Get on deck, lad. This is no place for you. Don’t fear that anything will be seen as you go up the ladder.”

“But I am afraid of being seen,” I replied in a whisper, “for I shall show myself to the men for what I really am.”

“There’s no chance any one will call you a coward, lad, an’ good reason why you should be in a blue funk. Of a verity this hold was like a shambles at the time when we strove to keep our own against that gang. There is no honor to be gained in a street brawl, and what has just been goin’ on here was hardly more than that. When a sailorman fights his vessel against another of equal strength, with victory dependin’ upon the handlin’ of his ship as well as the trueness of his aim, there comes to all of us the excitement caused by honorable warfare. But strugglin’ in the dark against a mob is dirty work.”

Then he led me to the ladder, taking due care,



out of the kindness of his heart, to come, between those of our people who were below, and myself, lest they should see my face and make comment upon it.

I went directly into the open air where the first light of the rising sun could be seen on the eastern horizon, and there sank down behind the rail hoping to be left unmolested.

It was Jethro Leighton who saw me come on deck, and quite naturally, he followed me.

It had not been possible for the old man to make his way down the narrow ladder because of the press of numbers at the top, and therefore he knew no more of what had occurred than could be told when the dead and wounded were brought up.

"Give me the whole story, lad, if it so be you can, for I'm believin' you had a dirty time of it down there for a spell."

The tears came into my eyes when I attempted to speak, and he, noting them, said in a soothing tone:—

"I've got a pretty generally good idee of how you're feelin', lad, an' can't blame you overly much; but it stands you in hand to brace up considerably, else our shipmates will set you down for what I know you ain't."



"And that's a coward," I said between my sobs.

The old man nodded his head.

"Well, they'd be right, Master Jethro. I am a coward, and here are the signs of it."

"I'm not so certain on that point, my lad; an' it's doughnuts to dollars that if Joe Staples was hauled on deck jest now, you'd find him shakin' as does a topsail when the ship is comin' about."

Then the old man soothed me in his rough way until the first deathly faintness caused by the scene had passed away, and I remained sufficiently master of myself to be able to speak without crying; but as for telling Jethro the story, that was impossible.

I myself knew nothing more than has been set down here, and I question if any man, save that demon who skulked in the hold, could have explained how all this slaughter began. For afterward, when talking with Master Staples, who had been on duty in the hold half an hour before the prisoners rushed out of the cages, I found him quite as ignorant as myself; his men, acting as sentinels, were pacing from one side to the other, instead of fore and aft, when suddenly the prisoners were free to begin the attack.

No one had seen any person tampering with the bolts and bars, and yet the doors were locked when



the old seaman and I went to make report to Mr. Wadsworth.

However, I told Jethro all I knew, which was little enough, and then we fell to speculating as to the meaning of it all, continually coming back to the fact that we had on board somebody, neither a member of the crew, nor yet one of the prisoners, who had made his way into the hold without the knowledge of any person whatsoever, save it was the Frenchmen themselves.

"You may be certain the old man will smoke him out, whoever he is," Jethro said, referring to our commander, when we were come to an end of our fruitless guesses. "I'll warrant that there'll be an overhaulin' of the dunnage before four an' twenty hours have passed, an' whosoever started that shindy will be run aloft with a rope around his neck. I'm countin' on bein' among them as tails on to the halter."

The *Enterprise* was now in proper shape, and on her course for St. Kitts. It was not likely any search would be made until we arrived in harbor, and I mentally nerved myself for the task of serving breakfast to the prisoners, although almost anything would have been preferable to going into that hold so lately tenanted by death.



I succeeded in the task, however, but not without many an inward shudder and outward evidence of faintness; and while thus engaged, observed that Master Staples had very wisely made a different disposal of his force. If the men had thus been stationed twelve hours ago, five lives and much suffering would have been saved.

Now in front of each cage door stood an armed sentinel, and pacing fore and aft to a point ten or twenty feet beyond the last prison, was a fifth man. They were now guarding the prisoners against whomsoever lay hidden among the dunnage, rather than to prevent them from making a second attempt at escape, and of that kind of business surely the Frenchmen had had a full dose.

In such manner was the watch kept until we arrived in the harbor of St. Kitts, and during all this while I venture to say that Master Staples never once laid himself down for a nap; whatsoever of sleep he gained was taken standing, or sitting on the bench where his slumbers were not likely to be prolonged.

Within an hour after the *Enterprise* had come to an anchor midway between the two prizes, and when everything had been snugged down shipshape, all the crew, save those on duty in the hold, were summoned



on deck; and I'll venture to say that every man jack of them was firmly convinced the time had come when we were to learn the secret regarding the uprising of the prisoners.

That he realized fully how important was the situation, could be seen when the commander took it upon himself to address the men and order the searching of the ship; but this he did briefly:—

“It is not necessary for me to explain what you already know. We have had a traitor among us since the night of the engagement with *La Citoyenne*. I now propose to find that person, and ask that each of you consider himself personally responsible for the thoroughness of the search about to be made. If one of this crew is a traitor, it is absolutely necessary all be made acquainted with the fact; therefore let each man watch his neighbor, for unless we find a skulker below, it goes without saying that there is treachery among ourselves. The port watch, under my command, will be stationed above the hatch in such manner that no living thing can cross the deck without our knowledge. The starboard watch, led by Mr. Wadsworth, will go into the hold, and beginning at the bow, sweep, in a closely formed line, the entire length of the ship, examining every possible hiding-



place. Let no man attempt to advance ahead of his neighbor; but all in a perfect line so that no villain can break through."

He who reads this can understand full well how the search was made, therefore it is not necessary for me to set down the details; and, in fact, of my own knowledge I know nothing, because of remaining on the gun-deck during such time as the work was being done.

I know, however, that the commander's orders were obeyed to the letter; that the starboard watch swept the ship from the bow straight aft, until they were come well into the wake, when I heard shouts of triumph, followed by exclamations of astonishment and even fear, and then a perfect babel of confusion, until Mr. Wadsworth's voice, ringing clear and sharp, brought the men into order.

Jethro remained by my side when the searching party filed down the ladder, and at the first outcry he said, clutching me by the wrist with a force sufficient to cause no little pain:—

"They've got him, an' all the yarns he may tell won't save his neck!"

"You speak as if knowing right well whom they have found."



"I've made a guess at it, lad, an' allow that I'm not far out of the way."

"Who is it?" I asked, filled with curiosity, for until this moment the old sailor had declared that he could not so much as guess whether the skulker was a Frenchman or a Yankee.

"I won't go into pertic'lars now, lad, 'cause I may be mistaken; but it has come to my mind since mornin' that I could give a mighty clear guess as to the meanin' of it all."

We could hear the shuffling of footsteps as the men came toward the ladder, and additional exclamations of surprise and amazement as they passed the sentinels, thus telling that he who had been captured was known to all our people, and yet not so much as an inkling of the truth came to my mind.

With my eyes riveted on the hatchway, I saw first appear half a dozen sailors, each of whom drew his cutlass on gaining the deck, and thus stood prepared to receive the wretched prisoner who followed.

Jethro and I pressed yet nearer, and then it was to me as if I had received a bullet full in my heart; for emerging from the hatchway, forced on from behind by three or four men, was none other than Miles Partlett!



Miles Partlett! A lad who, coward though he had shown himself to be, I mourned for when it was believed he had died, as a brave fellow should, in the heat of action! Miles Partlett! He who was credited on the ship's log with having been knocked overboard during the battle; a lad who disgraced himself before his shipmates; who had evidently at one time nerved himself to look upon suicide as a positive relief, and who now stood revealed as that miserable wretch who would have given over our ship to the enemy—on whose soul lay the sin of what was neither more nor less than murder!

It seemed incredible! As if some person told you he had seen one risen from the dead, and then made good his words!

In all my life I had never known anything so horrible!

During the years which may be allotted me here on earth, I pray never to come again upon so horrible a fact.

When I had sufficiently recovered from the stupefaction to be capable of connected thought, the whole truth came upon me in a twinkling. I understood it all.

Finding that the little schooner which we had ex-



pected to capture without striking a blow was a veritable Tartar, and fearing, as usual, for his miserable life, the lad had, by some unfortunate chance, succeeded in raising the hatch so far as to permit of the passage of his body, without being perceived by those who were engaged in the conflict.

Once in the hold he was most likely overcome by fear at the contemplation of what his shipmates would do when this additional evidence of cowardice was made public, and therefore decided to remain in hiding indefinitely, counting, no doubt, on being able to slip ashore when next we made port.

Having chosen this course, it was necessary he have food, and how could it be obtained save by making friends with the Frenchmen? After that all was simple; they hatched the plot, and he did whatsoever they told him in the carrying out of the plan, fearing to disobey their commands lest they discover him to us. He was favored in the wicked scheme by the manner in which our sentinels were stationed, for it was easy to find a hiding-place among the dunnage.

It is not necessary for me to set down any further speculations on the subject, and in fact, at that time, when I was literally weak from the shock caused by



seeing him, there was no idea in my mind of attempting to reason out the details.

This same Miles whom I had called my comrade, and would have done whatsoever I might for his well-being, was the person for whose life the crew clamored, and who, as I could not but admit, deserved the most shameful death.

I did not have the heart to follow on deck to see him stand a worse than traitor before the commander; but I knew later that no word was spoken by either of the officers.

The miserable wretch was taken to the break of the quarter, and there, hanging his head with shame as well he might, all gazed at him in anger and reproach.

There was no sign of pity shown, and, finally, when it must have seemed as if half a lifetime had been spent in that terrible scrutiny, his legs and arms were ironed, and he was thrust into a small store-room which led out from Mr. Wadsworth's cabin.

At the door of this prison was stationed a marine, and it was understood by the crew that a guard would stand over him day and night until his fate was decided.

It cut me to the heart, despite the fact that the lad would have done us such cruel wrong, when I



remembered having prayed that whosoever was responsible for such a scene as I had witnessed in the hold would be made to suffer severely because of his crimes. It was, to my mind, almost as if I had had some part in bringing him to where he now stood, an object of scorn to all honest people, and my heart was sore within me.

Jethro Leighton remained by my side in silence for ten minutes or more after Miles Partlett had been taken on deck, and then he said, speaking in the most friendly tone:—

“It stands to reason, lad, that you’re takin’ all this to heart, an’ yet it’s your duty to put a different face on the matter.”

“What do you mean?” I asked, so nearly stupefied by the terrible discovery that I failed to understand the drift of his words.

“You mustn’t look at this affair as if it concerned you in any way. Miles Partlett was your shipmate so long as he behaved like an honest lad; but the moment he went wrong, you broke away from him, an’ that settles the whole business as completely as if you had never known him.”

I made no reply to this remark, simply because words failed me. It would be impossible to make



the old sailor understand all that was in my heart; and even though he should realize it, I question if his advice would have been different.

Master Jethro saw that he was not on the right tack, if he would soothe my grief, and he tried a sailor's dose — hard work.

Within five minutes' time he had set me half a dozen tasks, every one of which, according to his representations, must be performed immediately, and took it upon himself to threaten me with the rope's end if I did not "stir my stumps in proper style."

I did as he commanded without really knowing in what manner my hands were occupied, and paid but little attention when Joe Staples came up to where Jethro was lounging against the gun he had ordered me to polish.

Even though my mind was in such a whirl, I could not avoid hearing what the old sailor said to my taskmaster, because of the fact that he spoke on the one subject to which I could really give heed.

"I'm allowin' Miles Partlett will be hanged by sunrise to-morrow, if it so be the commander counts on doin' what's needed," Joe said, as if the only question in the whole matter was as to the time which might be set for the execution.



"It stands to reason there'll be a trial, an' I'm reckonin' that the little villain won't get his just deserts much before the next day," Jethro replied carelessly.

"What beats me is, that a boy who has been brought up as it's reasonable to suppose Miles Partlett was, should go so far wrong in sich a short time."

"It all comes from his bein' a coward. I never knew one of those white-feather duffers what wasn't mean all the way through."

"But surely, Master Jethro," I interrupted, "Miles had no idea of turning traitor when he went into the hold to hide!"

"I grant you that, lad; but once there he listened to any plan the frog-eaters liked to make, ready to give over his shipmates and the ship, if by so doin' he could keep his precious body safe an' sound. It is, 'cordin' to my way of thinkin', jest as bad as if he'd been figgerin' for a month or more on how to set the prisoners free."

Joe Staples was on the point of airing his views on the subject when one of the marines came up hurriedly, and not seeing me because at the moment I was standing behind one of the guns, said sharply:—



"Paul Burton is wanted aft. Do you know where he is?"

"Who's in sich a hurry to see the lad?" Jethro asked in a tone of irritation, as if he felt seriously displeased because I had been summoned aft.

"The commander himself, an' it won't be comfortable for the lad if he don't show up precious soon."

I stepped from behind the gun, and the marine cried breathlessly, as if employed on business which admitted of no delay:—

"You're to report to Commander Shaw at once, boy, so see to it that you move lively!"

"He'll come near movin' 'cordin' to his own idees, without takin' any orders from a lobster like you," Joe Staples cried angrily, stepping menacingly toward the marine, who thought it prudent to go aft as fast as he had come forward.

"Well, lad," Jethro said, laying his hand on my shoulder, "it stands you in hand to obey orders, for you're bound to move lively, even though we wouldn't allow that half-baked soldier-sailor to lay down the law."

I was thoroughly frightened, as I asked:—

"Do you suppose the officers believe I had any hand in the mischief Miles has done?"



“Not a bit of it, my lad. Don’t bother your head with sich nonsense as that. I allow the commander wants to find out how the villain carried hisself while he messed with the crew, an’ you’d be more likely to know all that than one of us old shell-backs. Get on, my boy, an’ put your fears out of mind.”

Despite Jethro’s encouraging words, I was as timorous as a lad well could be when I descended the companionway leading to Mr. Shaw’s quarters; but his friendly nod when I had saluted went far toward restoring my courage.

“I hear that your behavior aboard the schooner has been even better than might have been expected from a green hand,” he began, and I could not for the life of me decide whether any reply should be made to such a remark.

After a pause, which seemed to me very long, he said in a kindly tone:—

“Inasmuch as you and Miles Partlett were the only boys aboard, it stands to reason that you were mates.”

“We were, sir, till the men put upon him because he hid himself when we went into action,” I replied.

“And then you sided with the crew against him?”

“No, sir; I tried to show him that he was in as much



danger below, as on deck ; but he refused to have very much to say to me when the crew began knocking him about."

"Did you have any idea he might have been the skulker which caused you and Staples so much anxiety?"

"Oh, no, sir," I made haste to say, thinking he was trying to prove that I was in some degree responsible for the crime Miles had committed. "I supposed that he was dead, sir."

"Then you, in common with some others, believed the lad had been knocked overboard during the engagement?" he asked after a pause, and I knew from such a question that mine was not the first interview he had held on the same subject during the forenoon.

"We could not think of him in any other way, sir, for he disappeared during the action, and Master Staples was certain no one could go below without his knowledge."

"Do you know anything regarding his parents?"

"No, sir, only that it was said his father had sufficient influence with the Congress to have him taken on board here."

"Do you know that he wants to speak with you?"

I looked up in surprise and dismay. The idea of



holding converse with Miles at any time was most disagreeable, and I shrank from even seeing him.

"Apparently you are not willing to grant his request," the commander said, eying me sharply.

"I had rather not, sir. There is nothing I can say which would do him any good, and I should be forced to tell him that the men swear he shall be hanged."

"So it is the opinion of the crew that he deserves death?"

"That is what they all say, sir; but it seems cruel to kill a lad who fell into his wickedness through cowardice."

"The prisoner has asked to have an interview with you, and I am disposed to grant the request."

"Now, sir?" I asked in alarm.

"Yes, because I have decided to send him home for trial, lest it should be said that I acted while under the influence of anger. Our last prize will be converted into a cartel in order that all our prisoners may be sent to a home port, and he will go with them; you can tell him so."

Having heard this I was no longer unwilling to go to the miserable lad, because surely it would give him relief of mind to know that he need have no



fear of immediate death, and I said as much to the commander, whereupon, summoning a marine, he ordered that I be led to the narrow quarters which served as a prison for the traitor.

Miles was sitting on the floor, his back against the bulkhead, unable to move because of the irons which fettered his limbs, and one glance at his face was enough to show that he realized fully the depth of infamy to which he had brought himself.

"The orders are that you shall go inside and the door be locked upon you," the guard said, and I heard the words as if from afar off; but had sufficient consciousness of the situation to step within the tiny apartment, when immediately we were in darkness, for once the door had been closed there was no longer any aperture to admit light.

Even for this I was thankful, because it pained me to look into that face which was so ghastly with horrible fears.

"I didn't think they'd let you come," Miles began, and I could well understand that he was at a loss for words with which to begin the conversation.

"It was the commander himself who sent me here."

"What do the men say about — about — what I did?"



It was a hard question to answer; but after a brief pause I made up my mind that the lad should know exactly how the crew viewed his treachery, and I gave it to him plainly.

“Do you think they will hang me?” he asked with a whine. “That’s what the marine said they counted on doing.”

“If the men had their way, Miles Partlett, I believe you would be run up within an hour; but Commander Shaw has just told me that you are to be sent home for trial.”

“Home!” the wretched lad repeated. “How can I go there? They had better kill me now, and have an end of it.”

“You can’t have your choice, Miles, after all that has happened. Through you five men have been killed and four wounded; if the plan had been carried out a little earlier, no one can say how terrible might have been the result. Certain it is that the schooner would be in the hands of the enemy, and very many of her crew dead.”

The boy made no reply, and I, fancying full well how much of agony there might be in his heart, refrained from saying anything more which might add to it.



We remained there in silence perhaps five minutes, and then he said petulantly, more like a child who is deprived of some pleasure than a lad who was stained with blood:—

“I thought you would treat me differently; but I suppose you are bound to follow the example of the men.”

If he had been my own brother, I could not at that moment have refrained from saying harsh things; and, without mincing words, I put before him all his evil actions exactly as they were, concluding by saying:—

“How do you expect any one could treat you in an affectionate manner, Miles, after all that has been done? But for the fact that the commander allowed me to bring the news that you were to be sent home instead of hanged, I would have begged not to be forced to see your face again. Do you think that we, who stood so near death or imprisonment because of your treachery, can look upon it as a trifling matter?”

“I wouldn’t have chummed in with the Frenchmen unless I had needed something to eat.”

“Why did you go into the hold in the first place?”



"Because the little schooner was pouring shot into us at such a rate that there didn't seem to be one chance in a hundred a fellow could get out of the scrape with his life."

"And yet you have come to know that there are worse things than death, Miles. Do you want to say any more to me?"

"I didn't count on getting a dressing down when I asked you to come."

"What did you want?"

"I thought you might help me, seeing as how you always allowed to be such a friend."

"No one can help you now, Miles, not even the commander himself. You must stand a trial for what you have done, and bear the punishment, whatever may be inflicted, like a man."

"If that's all you've got to say, there's no need of your staying any longer," he cried in a tone of irritation, and without delay I knocked on the door as a signal to the sentinel that I wished to come out.

Short as had been the time occupied by the interview, I found matters in a fine state of confusion when I went on deck again.

The prize, *La Citoyenne*, had been warped alongside the *Enterprise*, and already was the work of



transferring the prisoners from our hold into hers begun.

Every member of the crew showed plainly the relief he felt at being rid of the Frenchmen; and little wonder, for it was like carrying loose powder to have them below in such numbers.

Jethro saw me as I came up the companionway, and waited at the break of the quarter for me to join him.

"Well, our coward is gettin' off easier than he deserves?" the old man said questioningly; and I, remembering the expression on the lad's face, replied:—

"I'm not so certain, Master Leighton, but that it would be a favor to hang him offhand, for he'll suffer terribly in mind between now and the time the prize arrives in port."

"I hope so!" the old man said fervently. "He's needin' a deal of severe punishment, an' all he gets won't be enough to square matters."

"Do you know if he is to be kept with the other prisoners?"

"Bless you, no. They give a traitor better quarters than they do honest seamen who fight for their country, so it seems. Miles Partlett will have quar-



ters in one of the small cabins aft; but you can make certain that from the time the prize gets under way until Yankee officers go on board to carry him to jail, there will be mighty close watch kept over him."



## CHAPTER X

### AGAIN THE LUGGER

I WAS fortunate in not seeing Miles Partlett again prior to his departure, and this exceeding relief was in a measure due to myself, because I took especial pains to bring it about.

The prisoners having been transferred to the prize which was converted into a cartel, there remained for me no other duties save such as would naturally devolve upon "the boy" aboard a vessel of war, and, as may be imagined, these were not arduous.

I was at liberty to go here or there when relieved from duty by the officer of the watch to which I had been assigned; and, therefore, anxious to avoid a second interview with Miles, I spent the greater portion of the time which elapsed before the sailing of *La Citoyenne* well forward, curled up between two guns where was the least likelihood of attracting attention.

To this hiding-place it was that I fled after having come from the interview with the traitor, and here also I was followed by Jethro and Joe Staples, who,



finding me in a pitiful state of collapse, waited like the tender-hearted shipmates they were until I should have recovered somewhat.

And here I want to set it down that these two old shell-backs, men accustomed to the seamy rather than the smooth side of life, whose words were coarse and whose actions were uncouth, had hearts more tender than one could find in the average lad. Honest they were without boasting of it; true friends ever ready to deal a blow or speak a soothing word accordingly as they believed one or the other to be necessary. I owe them much for numberless little acts of kindness which more refined men would have neglected entirely, and am their debtor for all the good nature which licks into shape without distortion that cub of a boy who has been sent to sea in order that he may the sooner become a man.

Well, these two old barnacles respected the grief which was come upon me, and not being willing to leave me alone, yet realizing that conversation at such a time might be disagreeable, they squatted on the deck near where I was lying, and smoked in silence.

No other person can really understand how much of a boon it was to have those two old shell-backs so kindly and true, waiting close by to lend me a hand



when I was in condition to receive one. There was in their silence that evidence of tender-heartedness which I shall never forget, and knowing how sweet to me in the time of my trouble was their simple good nature combined with keen watchfulness, I have ever tried to pay the debt they put upon me by dealing out to lads, with whom I have come in contact since then, that same true friendliness.

Words fail to express all the affection which I came to know for those old cronies. As memory brings their faces before me now, my heart goes out to them in love, and I feel keenly my inability to express the debt of gratitude which I owe to both.

The task of transferring the prisoners from the *Enterprise* to *La Citoyenne* was begun almost immediately after I quitted Miles Partlett's prison, and was concluded by the time I was ready to give attention to my two old friends.

Jethro Leighton made me aware of this fact by saying in a careless tone, as if the matter was of no especial importance to himself or me:—

“All the bad blood which was on the *Enterprise* has been taken away; we're a clean ship once more, and ready to cruise about in search of another prize.”

There was a question on my face as I looked up



at him, and he, understanding that it was my wish to know if Miles yet remained aboard, said quietly:—

“We have transshipped them all, and can now begin to lead the life of honest privateersmen, with nothing to make us sad or ashamed, save that which comes in the regular course of war.”

To this statement Joe Staples added:—

“The cartel will be under way in less than half an hour, with Midshipman Powers in command. By fitting out two prize crews our force is reduced to seventy-one; but, bless you, lad, we’ll be big enough for any Frenchman we shall find cruisin’ in these ’ere waters. If not, we know full well that our schooner can show her heels to anything that floats.”

Having thus attracted my attention and drawn me out from the shroud of sorrow which had enveloped me, the two old shell-backs set about, in a delicate way, to learn the particulars of my interview with Miles.

Understanding that it was their right to know all which had taken place, and eager to be done with the disagreeable story as soon as possible, I hurriedly repeated that which had been said to me by the unhappy lad, and I having come to the end of the tale, Jethro added with the air of one who gives a command:—



"From this day out we'll drop the subject, lad. It doesn't leave a pleasant taste in an honest man's mouth, an' there's no good sense in harkin' back on it."

"I reckon we've got a tidy bit of work to do before leavin' port again," Joe Staples said, half to himself; "but once that's done, we'll be ready to show what the little *Enterprise* can do in the carryin' on of this 'ere war which, as I understand it, is no real war at all, so far as the lawyers would argue it."

And Jethro added solemnly:—

"I'm lookin', Paul, to see you win a commission before this 'ere cruise has come to an end, but you're to forget all that has happened from the day we left port, save that thus far you've done your duty like a man."

Then the old fellows set about discussing the chances of our finding other prizes on the cruising grounds to which we had been assigned, and during the conversation harked back to the behavior of the three-masted lugger which, after having sent a challenge, absolutely refused to give us battle.

They talked idly now and then when the ordinary subjects of conversation failed, and seemed so desirous of beguiling the hours, that I grew curious as to



their intentions, until finally the shouts of our men on deck told that the cartel was getting under way. Then it was I knew that these true friends had simply been trying to divert my attention until all that had caused me so much trouble was out of sight.

Not until an hour later did they make any move toward a change of position, and then Master Jethro, with many a grave word of command as if he had just begun to realize that I was wasting time, set me about the almost useless task of polishing one of the guns.

When, toward sunset, I went on deck, the *Enterprise* and *La Seine* were alone in the harbor save for a few fishing vessels.

I breathed a long sigh of relief, for it was to me as if a new cruise had just been begun, and I found that the sorrow in my heart was giving way to an intense desire to be in action once more.

Lest I spend too many words on that which will be of but little interest to those who read these lines, I propose to cut short any account of our further stay in the harbor of St. Kitts.

We had so far retaken three American vessels and captured an equal number of the enemy, thus



putting to the credit of the *Enterprise* six vessels, which alone would serve to make up a successful cruise if no other work should be done, and because of this, most likely, the commander believed he was entitled to spend all the time necessary in thoroughly refitting the schooner.

During ten days did we remain in harbor, all hands working like beavers to obliterate the scars of warfare, and then was come the time when, amid the joyous cheers of the men, we put to sea once more, little dreaming what a happy trick fortune was about to play upon us.

We laid a southeasterly course, passing between Antigua and Desirade, and on the second day out, when the *Enterprise* was bowling along with a good ten-knot breeze, there came from the lookout that hail which plunged us as usual into a fever of excitement.

A large, three-masted vessel was reported down to leeward, and it stood us in hand to learn without loss of time whether she was of such weight as warranted a chase, for it would be decidedly unpleasant if we should suddenly find ourselves forced to play the part of pursued, instead of pursuer.

Many a time had our old sea-lawyers argued as



to whether the commander would be so reckless as to attack a ship very much heavier than ourselves, and when we last lay in the harbor of St. Kitts, it was decided among them that Mr. Shaw had shown a sufficient amount of good seamanship to warrant them in the belief that he would not needlessly risk the destruction of his own vessel.

Therefore it was, when we bore away in chase, that all hands believed our officers would gain a very good idea of what might be ahead of us before taking many chances, and this belief was strengthened when in turn Mr. Shaw and each of the lieutenants went aloft to scan the stranger with their glasses.

An hour later, just as we could make out from the deck the upper spars of the chase, I was surprised by hearing Mr. Wadsworth cry:—

“Leighton, take my glasses, and see what you make of yonder sail!”

It was an odd command of a verity, this sending a common seaman aloft to scrutinize the stranger when all of our officers had spent considerable time at the task. The old shell-backs on deck looked on in surprise as Jethro marched gravely up to the break of the quarter, took the glass from the officer's hand,



and then clawed his way aloft, monkey fashion, to the crosstrees.

I was watching the old man intently, thinking that he would be puffed up with pride at being thus chosen from among all the crew to give an opinion; and therefore it was that I saw, or fancied I saw him start in astonishment after one glance, then polishing the glasses vigorously with the sleeve of his coat, look again.

A good ten minutes did Jethro spend at the mast-head, and when he came down there was on his face an expression of most decided satisfaction.

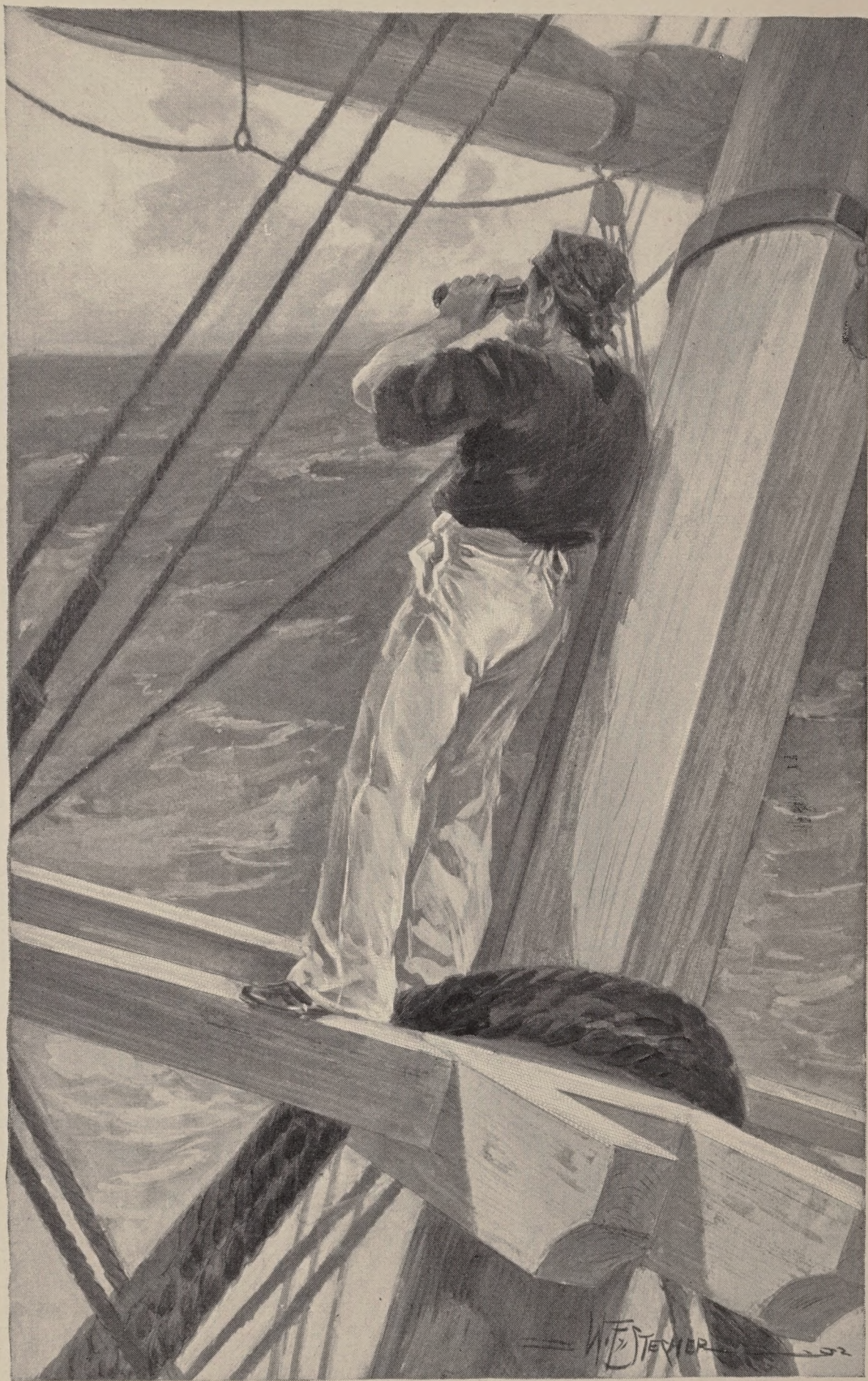
Every man in the vicinity crowded aft when the old fellow went to make his report, and I, who was as near as good breeding and the rules of the ship would allow, heard him say to Mr. Wadsworth:—

“It’s the same craft, sir, an’ this time I hope there won’t be many minutes spent in sendin’ a challenge.”

“Little fear of that, Leighton,” the second lieutenant said with a laugh; and as he turned away all hands gathered around Jethro, demanding that he explain the meaning of his words.

I fancy the old seaman thoroughly enjoyed his importance just then, for he hung in the wind while his mates plied him with questions; and finally, having





"A GOOD TEN MINUTES DID JETHRO SPEND AT THE MAST-HEAD."







kept them in suspense as long as he thought safe, he asked, with a fine flourish of his hand in the direction of the chase:—

“What do you think yonder craft may be?”

“We’re waitin’ for you to tell us,” Joe Staples said irritably. “Come down off your high horse, Jethro Leighton, an’ let us know what we’re chasin’!”

“It’s an old friend of ours, Joe, an’ one you’ll be glad to lay aboard; for this time there will be no loiterin’ at anchor for her, while we’re runnin’ off an’ on coolin’ our heels.”

“The three-masted lugger!” Joe Staples cried in excitement. “If you love me, Jethro, tell us it’s the three-masted lugger!”

“I’m not so certain about lovin’ you, Joe, but it’s she all the same; an’ accordin’ to what I’ve seen of her, we’ll soon be where our bow guns can hail.”

Had a stranger been suddenly dropped on the deck of the *Enterprise* at that instant, he would have believed that every man jack of the crew had gone crazy, so wild were the demonstrations of joy made by the men.

There was no vessel sailing under the French flag which we would have been better pleased to meet with than this same lugger, which had challenged in port



in order to make a great show of bravery to the people ashore, and then cowardly refused to meet us.

No one reckoned the chances for success or failure. Even though we had known she was twice our weight, every man aboard would have cried out in anger had the commander changed his course through motives of prudence.

On every previous occasion I had seen our men make ready for action by a careless glance at the guns and the ammunition which had been supplied for the opening of a battle; but now all, except those absolutely on duty, went from piece to piece examining each carefully, and remedying this or that fancied defect. They were as nice about it as a housewife is in preparing for some fastidious guest; and no one waited to call upon him whose duty it was to do this or that particular thing, but performed the task himself, until we should have made a brave display at the beginning of the action even if we were pitted against a frigate.

When we had run the chase hull down, those below demanded from their mates on deck reports every few moments as to the condition of affairs; and I firmly believe that, if anything had prevented our coming alongside that Frenchman, the old shell-backs,



hardened though they were, would actually have shed tears because of mortification and sorrow.

But nothing did prevent. The wind held friendly, and the lugger, laboring on, hoping against hope that she might escape meeting an enemy weaker than herself, dared not even show her colors.

From our masthead the stars and stripes were floating a brave defiance, and I could well fancy that those on the deck of the lugger must have imagined there was a certain menace even in the schooner herself, as she bore down upon them like some living thing eager for the contest.

We knew, or believed we did, that the chase carried the same number of guns as we, but had nearly twice as many men as were on board the *Enterprise*; yet that disparity in numbers was not considered for a moment by the seamen who were so eager to make reprisals for the disappointment we had suffered.

We persuaded ourselves that she would stand up to us bravely when there was no longer hope she could escape, for there must have been some aboard who had courage, otherwise that challenge would not have been sent when we laid at anchor, — unless, indeed, they had counted from the first to deceive us; and at the prospect of a hot action I began to grow timorous,



for there was nothing with which to occupy my hands, the men doing all of the work themselves as if it was a labor of love.

During four hours I moved here and there, striving most earnestly to keep my thoughts from what appeared to be before us, and then was forced to bring to mind Miles Partlett's disgrace in order to fight back the cowardice which assailed me.

However, it is not well that I set down too much regarding myself in this effort to give an account of the wonderful cruise of the *Enterprise*.

It is enough if I say that four hours after Jethro went aloft to decide the question of identity, we pitched a shot from one of our bow guns over the lugger as a gentle hint that she heave to; and every member of the crew stood motionless, watching eagerly, as if afraid she might serve us the trick of striking her colors without first showing her teeth.

Instead of obeying the command given by our gun, the Frenchman held his wind a bit, and let fly a 12-pound shot with very poor aim, for the missile struck the water fifty yards astern of us.

This evidence that she was willing to try conclusions, however, plunged our men into a frenzy of joy, and they cheered again and again, as if the enemy



had done them some wonderfully good service in thus evincing a willingness to capture their ship.

There was no need of sending the men to quarters, for they had voluntarily gone there half an hour previous; and when we came up into the wind in order that our broadside might be brought to bear, every gunner was waiting for the command.

“Aim at her spars!” Mr. Wadsworth shouted, “and begin work as soon as you choose!”

The officer must have been surprised by the celerity displayed in obeying orders, for the words had no more than been spoken when our guns were discharged, and I, craning my neck out of the port-hole even while the men were hauling in the piece preparatory to reloading, saw the white splinters fly from main and mizzenmast, telling that at the first discharge we had wounded those spars.

While standing there, forgetting that I had ever been in the slightest degree timorous, I saw jets of smoke, amid which could be distinguished tongues of flame, spout out from the lugger's side, and then half a dozen shot went hurtling over our deck, plunging with a hiss and a scream into the sea beyond.

The crew of the *Enterprise* cheered—cheered because they had been fired upon; and if those



aboard the lugger heard the outcries, they must have understood, however dimly, the eagerness of our people to engage in battle with them.

Never before nor since have I seen guns loaded and discharged so rapidly. I believe, truly, that we fired three broadsides while the enemy was discharging one, and then a groan went up from every shell-back aboard the schooner, as the lugger's colors were hauled down in token of submission.

It was much the same as if she had struck when we fired the first gun, and the disappointment aboard us was extreme.

"If we had met in yonder lugger them as manned *La Citoyenne*, this 'ere make-believe of an action would have been a battle," Master Jethro said bitterly. "It's a disgrace to honest men for the frog-eaters to lay down without so much as showing fight."

"They're cowards, an' we had good reason to know it when they refused to come out after havin' asked a favor of us," Joe Staples replied. "They're sich cowards as make a man ashamed he's a human bein'."

Then from one and another came angry and scornful words until there was such a tumult on the gun-deck that Mr. Wadsworth was forced to order us to



"shut our mouths," in order that the commander might hear the reply made to his hail.

According to the custom of seamen the enemy should have been spoken before we fired, and therefore we would have known with whom we were fighting; but because the lugger's people had already shown themselves cowards, we treated them to the discourtesy of first speaking through the mouths of our guns.

Now Mr. Shaw was about to take possession, and regardless of their having shown the white feather, he proceeded to do so in proper fashion.

"Ahoy on the lugger! Who are you?"

The reply came in French; but one of our men who had for a certain time hailed from Havre, translated for me the words which were, in substance, that the prize was the *Bon Ami*, a letter of marque carrying twelve guns and a crew of ninety-one men. In addition to this force she had a dozen passengers or more, among whom was a general officer and a captain in the French army.

At the moment we never even dreamed that these two last named gentlemen could by any possibility be of service to us; but a few days later we found them of more value than even the lugger herself.



To show how faint hearted were those frog-eaters who could send out a challenge while lying in a neutral port and then deliberately back down from their own words, it is only necessary to say that not a drop of blood had been spilled during the short engagement. They had lowered their colors without having any reason therefor, and old Jethro said, commenting upon the fact:—

“If we of the *Enterprise* had allowed ourselves to do such a thing as that, I'd have asked somebody to hit me a clip on the nose, so we might show some little signs of blood.”

We were yet near St. Kitts, and Commander Shaw decided to run back to that port. Although it had been shown that there was little need of such precautions, he sent the *Bon Ami's* crew between decks, allowing the officers and passengers to remain in the cabin under parole.

A prize crew of six men was thrown aboard, and both ships put about on a direct course for the harbor we had just left.

If I were to set down all the disparaging words spoken by our men against the enemy we had captured, an hundred pages like this would not suffice to contain them. From the moment we bore up for



port, every mother's son on board grumbled because the lugger had surrendered so readily, as if he was in some way defrauded of his rights through not being allowed to stand his chances of receiving a wound; and very unfavorable to the men of the lugger were the references made to our meeting the little schooners which had been fought so desperately against overwhelming odds.

"When it comes to takin' prizes, this 'ere cruise is what you might call a bloomin' success," Jethro said that evening to a group of his shipmates who were gathered forward discussing the very tame events of the day. "Mind you, I say in the way of takin' prizes; but when it comes to a satisfactory piece of business, then we're out of it. I ain't one of these 'ere blood-thirsty villains what needs to cut an' slash all the time; an' by the same token I ain't a meek little lamb what wants the grass brought and put in his mouth, so he won't have the trouble of gnawin' on it. It's what I call a failure, this 'ere voyage. When we run across a craft somewhere near our own size, who could hold us in hand long enough to give the men an idee of fightin', she strikes her colors, an' there you are. Nothin' to do but transship the prisoners, send 'em below, an' toddle back to port.



If you run across a little whiflet of a yawl boat with half a dozen men, they'll fight like Kilkenny cats; an' it makes you ashamed of yourself to fire into 'em, 'cause it's much like settin' a cow to catch mice."

Then Joe Staples took up the song.

"I've hearn tell that these frog-eaters counted themselves somethin' big when it was a case of fightin'; but barrin' the little schooners Jethro speaks of, we don't see any of that terrible bravery. Why, 'cordin' to our experience on this 'ere cruise, I'd have one hand tied behind me, an' then consider myself equal to five of these 'ere dandified Parleyvous. It's almost sickenin' when you come to think of it, an' then again, it's a case of spoilin' what might be a decent crew if they had the proper chance. In case the *Enterprise* keeps on pickin' up this sort of cattle, we'll get to be so bad that when a second broadside is fired we're bound to haul down our colors because of gettin' used to that sort of thing."

"The prize money comes in all the same," one of the younger members of the crew said gleefully. "We can tassel our neckerchiefs with big, round dollars, an' not have to lay out much money for stickin'-plaster."

"The dollars ain't the whole of this 'ere business,"



Jethro replied solemnly, and in a tone of reproach. "We're out to make the Frenchmen understand that they can't come foolin' 'round our waters playin' hob whichever way they choose; an' it isn't goin' to be done by pickin' up these 'ere little smacks filled with innocent children what are afraid of a noise. As I said before, I ain't roamin' 'round jest for the sake of tryin' my hand at killin' folks; but likewise I object to tacklin' a lot of lambs, 'cause it's more like murder than square, stand-up fightin'. If we get much of this kind of business, I'm goin' to ask for my discharge the next time we make port, an' that's the whole of it."

Then Jethro, whose watch was off duty, turned into his hammock like a man thoroughly disgusted with the world, and the remainder of the party followed his example.

Eight and forty hours later we were swinging at anchor once more in the harbor of St. Kitts, with the lugger astern flying the stars and stripes; and the ground tackle was no more than down when a small boat rowed by four men, with two in the stern-sheets, came away from the town as if in the greatest haste to board us.

When they arrived alongside, we made out the vis-



itors to be the American consul at St. Kitts, and the other had the appearance of a seafaring man.

Mr. Wadsworth received the two at the gangway as if they were old friends, and at once led them into the cabin, where they stayed half an hour or more before going ashore.

Then it was that through one of the gossip carriers—a marine, of course—we heard somewhat of the cause for the visit.

I cannot pretend to give the story as the marine told it, because it would require too many words; but in substance it was this:—

A French frigate lying at Guadaloupe had, regardless of the laws of neutrality, sent a force of men ashore and taken as prisoners two officers of the American army, who had arrived at that port after being shipwrecked off the Florida straits.

These valiant Frenchmen, very likely similar to such as we had run across, not only illegally held our countrymen as prisoners, but were threatening to hang them in retaliation for an execution ordered by Commodore Talbot, when two French prisoners under parole had plotted the murder of the Yankee crew who captured them.

It seems that the seaman accompanying our consul



was the captain of an American merchantman which had been captured by the French frigate and exchanged for some frog-eaters who were held at Guadeloupe; and he, in order to prevent the murder of the Yankees had, at the risk of his life and in the absence of an American vessel nearer, come to St. Kitts in a small fishing smack with the hope of finding some of our ships of war.

Having heard this story, and knowing that it would be useless for the little *Enterprise* to sail into Guadeloupe with the idea of overawing the frigate, our old shell-backs were in a fine state of perplexity, all of them declaring emphatically that the frog-eaters must not be allowed to do such a wrong; but at the same time wholly unable to figure how it might be prevented.



## CHAPTER XI

### L'AIGLE

IN the excitement consequent upon the information that the Frenchmen at Guadaloupe threatened to do that which would be condemned by every other civilized nation on the face of the earth, our people forgot the prize which had just been taken—forgot everything save the fact that two of their countrymen were in great danger where none save those belonging to the *Enterprise* were in a position to lend any aid.

There was a furious wagging of tongues on the gun-deck after we learned of the news brought by the two visitors, and the only point upon which all agreed was that we of the schooner must make immediate effort to release the Yankees who otherwise were like to lose their lives.

How it might be done no two were of like mind; but certain it is that never a man grew so rash as to propose that the *Enterprise* attempt to enter the harbor of Guadaloupe, where lay the French frigate.



Now although we had cried out against the frog-eaters for cowards, and had taken without a blow two prizes who were strong enough to have given us a hard struggle, we knew full well there were many brave men among the enemy, and it would be rank folly to show ourselves where we might be raked by the guns of a 74.

Jaw among themselves as they might, our old shell-backs could not hit upon any plan, however rash, which seemed to promise success, and every one was sore at heart because of such fact.

We were left at liberty from the time of coming to anchor until a full half hour had passed after the departure of the visitors, and then the boatswain piped all hands on deck.

"It's another case of fillin' the hold with prisoners that must be watched as a cat watches mice, with nothin' in the way of dollars at the end of it," Joe Staples grumbled as he obeyed the order; and I was much inclined to echo his words, for the idea of using the prison cages again was most repugnant to me.

To our great surprise, we found all the officers on the quarter-deck as if for inspection, and Jethro whispered in my ear:—



"What's gone wrong now? The commander looks as if he counted on givin' some of us a smart dressin' down."

"Perhaps he has rigged up a plan to help our countrymen who are in Guadaloupe," I said with a laugh, never for an instant dreaming I had hit the mark fairly.

We were yet further mystified when, instead of being set about stripping the prize of whatsoever might be needed by us, we were allowed to remain idly amidships while the crew of the first cutter was called away.

When the boat was in the water Mr. Wadsworth went over the rail, rigged out in all his fine toggery, and we stood gaping in astonishment, for the oldest among us had never before heard of paying a ceremonious call to a ship which had just been captured.

"Well, this beats anything I ever saw or heard tell of," Jethro whispered to me when we saw our second lieutenant going over the rail of the *Bon Ami*. "Things have come to a pretty pass if a Yankee officer must needs tog himself out to muster a crowd of cowardly prisoners. Do you think, lad, that Commander Shaw has a screw loose in his head?"

The question seemed very comical to me, and I



laughed heartily at the idea of such a thing, for of a truth, our captain had shown himself to be a hard-headed, able sailor; but I could not for the life of me make head or tail to these proceedings.

The *Bon Ami* laid so near astern we could see plainly all that happened on her decks, and it was soon apparent that our lieutenant had no intention of mustering the prisoners.

He spoke with the midshipman who was in command of the prize, whereupon the latter immediately went into the after cabin, coming up a few moments later with the French general, captain, and two others in uniform whose rank we could not determine.

Then ensued an immense amount of bowing and scraping, after which Mr. Wadsworth appeared to be holding a private interview with the gentlemen which was not of a very pleasant nature, for the general held up his hands again and again as if stricken with horror.

"I'd give half a month's wages to know what's goin' on yonder," Jethro said, nervously moving about as if his curiosity was so great that he could not by any possibility remain in one position. "I've seen many an odd thing in my life, but never one equal to this!"



It appeared to me as if the Frenchmen were protesting against something which our lieutenant had said; and after a few moments spent in talk, Mr. Wadsworth straightened himself stiff as any ramrod, while he stood gazing at the prisoners.

Then it looked much as if the general wanted to refer the matter to some one on board the *Enterprise*, for he pointed in our direction several times, the lieutenant shaking his head now and then.

After a time I noted that Commander Shaw and our first lieutenant had gone into the cabin, as if to be out of sight from those on the deck of the prize.

Five minutes later, one of the Frenchmen with whom Mr. Wadsworth had been talking disappeared, coming on deck shortly afterward with an armful of valises and travelling cases.

Then, still talking and gesticulating in the most furious manner, the four French officers got into the cutter, followed by Mr. Wadsworth, and were rowed alongside the *Enterprise*.

The marine who was standing guard at the cabin companionway reported the fact that a boat was at the gangway, and our two officers came on deck as if to receive visitors of distinction.

"I'm blowed if the commander ain't bent on bein'



polite to the frog-eaters!" Jethro exclaimed. "Perhaps he wants to thank 'em for not puttin' us to more trouble when the lugger was captured."

Whatever the purpose may have been, we forward were left in total ignorance half an hour or more, after which word was passed for two marines to come aft.

Now it was that every old barnacle opened his eyes wide with astonishment, since there was no accounting for such a proceeding as this.

After receiving the officers as guests, it appeared very much as if the commander counted on putting them under a close guard, something which Joe Staples declared was never done on naval vessels.

"You'll find that the men are to be clapped into any kind of a hole between decks; but the high an' mighty officers will be allowed liberty after they've given their parole not to make any break at tryin' to escape," Joe Staples said with an air of wisdom; and we could do no less than agree he was in the right, because of his long experience on board vessels of war.

Now the men fell to wagging their tongues more furiously than ever in the effort to solve what was to them a deep mystery, and making nothing of the



situation; but plunged in a yet deeper maze when our officers came on deck once more, leaving behind the Frenchmen and the marines.

Again Mr. Wadsworth went on board the lugger, and shortly afterward we saw her commander and several of the passengers moving around the deck at will, as if having been paroled.

"It's all too thick for me," Jethro replied, when I urged him to make a guess at the situation. "There's no question but that the officers and passengers of the lugger are on parole, an' quite as certain that them as are in our cabin have stayed there under close guard. It knocks anything you ever saw, eh, Joe?"

"That it does," Master Staples replied, "an' you can make up your mind there's somethin' mighty deep afoot, else why haven't we been set about overhaulin' the lugger's hold; she's likely got ammunition which would come in handy for us."

Ten minutes later word was given for the starboard watch to go aboard the *Bon Ami*; and from that moment until night had come all hands of us were kept on the jump, as if time had suddenly become so precious that not a moment could be wasted.

In the midst of all this seeming confusion, when



we were transshipping this article or that which we of the *Enterprise* might need, the mystery which hung over us was increased yet further by Mr. Wadsworth, who deliberately went ashore, with the crew of the captain's gig to row him.

Jethro, Joe Staples, and I had been among those detailed to overhaul the goods in the lugger's hold, therefore we had very little idea of what was happening above, from the time the second lieutenant went on shore until we were called away for supper, the day's work having come to an end.

Then, to our astonishment, we saw a small craft, not unlike a felucca, made fast alongside the *Enterprise*.

The riddle was about to be solved. The marines who had been on duty aft came forward with such information as they had picked up by pulling their ears until they were donkey-length; and when all the story had been told, our fellows were aglow with excitement and admiration of the commander's ability.

Mr. Shaw had decided that if the Frenchmen at Guadaloupe could play the game of hanging prisoners of war, the Yankees at St. Kitts might take a hand in the same sport, and to that end he had taken from the lugger the four army officers which



we had captured. These were now under close guard aft, having been assured by our commander that they would be executed immediately after word was brought that the American prisoners had been put to death.

It was a case of reprisals with a vengeance, and since the commander of the frigate had declared most positively that the Yankees should be hanged, our prisoners were anything rather than comfortable in mind.

In order that the authorities at Guadaloupe might not remain in ignorance of his purpose, Mr. Shaw had hired the felucca, and counted on sending with her the French general, who was bound by a parole of honor to return in case the execution of the Yankees was an accomplished fact, or irrevocably determined upon.

It was only natural that the general would do everything within his power to procure the release of our countrymen in order to save his own life; and thus had Commander Shaw hit upon a plan for the saving of our people, which had a better chance for success than if we had a couple of frigates, instead of the French army officers, at our command.

If ever a crew was proud of their commander, it was ours after we learned all the details of the



scheme. The men were so excited and joyful as to be almost unable to contain themselves within any ordinary bounds.

For a time they would discuss the matter eagerly among themselves, and then some one would call for three cheers in honor of our commander, whereupon the old shell-backs would yell until the master-at-arms came below with the threat of putting all hands under arrest.

Then for another while all would go on as it should, until admiration and excitement caused some other fellow to propose three cheers, and we were treated to an additional visit from the master-at-arms.

Considering the fact that the *Enterprise* had ever been spoken of as a ship on which the strictest discipline was maintained, it was the wildest scene that could well be imagined as taking place on board a naval vessel.

Then, when the uproar had been stilled for a certain time, one of the marines came below with the information that the felucca was being got under way, and up the ladders we rushed to witness the departure.

The general, guarded by a marine, was coming out of the cabin just as I gained the deck, and it could



readily be seen that he was feeling mighty uncomfortable in mind.

He halted near where our commander was standing, and the two spoke together while one might have counted twenty. Then he went over the rail like one who goes to his doom, and the little craft was soon under full sail.

It was the opinion of our sea-lawyers that Mr. Shaw's scheme would prove a decided success, provided word of his purpose could be carried to Guadeloupe before the prisoners had been executed, and I prayed that the felucca might have a quick and prosperous voyage for the sake of those poor fellows whose lives depended upon her timely arrival.

It was late that night before the men of the *Enterprise* were able to settle down to rest; but finally, one by one dropped off to sleep even in the midst of the most noisy argument, until the master-at-arms might say with a sigh of relief that his labors had come to an end for the time being.

Next morning we continued overhauling the lugger, and taking on board the schooner such of her goods as we might need.

In the meanwhile the French sailors remained prisoners in the cages of their own vessel, while the



officers and passengers lounged around the deck at their own sweet will. In the cabin of the *Enterprise* three officers of the frog-eating army were guarded by two marines, and it can hardly be supposed they enjoyed themselves to any very great extent, knowing as they did that their lives would atone for any Yankee blood spilled at Guadaloupe.

All those old shell-backs who fancied they were so well posted as to what should be done in this case or that, believed the *Enterprise* would remain at anchor until the question as to the hostages had been settled ; but in this matter, as in many another, they were very far from the truth.

When the *Bon Ami* had been thoroughly overhauled, and we had covered with paint the scratches she had received in the last action, the officers held as hostages were sent on board the lugger, with four marines to guard them, and the little *Enterprise* was got under way for another cruise.

Some of the crew believed we were actually going to Guadaloupe to make further threats ; but Master Jethro said positively in reply to a question of mine : —

“ You can count it as certain, lad, that Commander Shaw knows full well he has done all within his power for the poor fellows who are in danger of death.



I heard Mr. Wadsworth say last night that in the town it was reported the famous French privateer, *L'Aigle*, had been seen off the port, an' you can count it as mighty nigh the truth that we're goin' out to search for her."

"Is she a big vessel?" I asked, just a trifle disturbed by the idea that we might soon be hunting for game which would prove too strong for us.

"It is said that she carries only ten guns an' a crew of eighty men, therefore we're about equal in size; but her captain is reported to be a wonderfully brave man, an' he must have good fighters under him, for small as she is, that brig has done more damage to English an' American shippin' than all the other French cruisers put together. It would be the biggest kind of a feather in our caps if we could take her into port."

"It seems to me that we should have waited to get some word from Guadaloupe," I ventured to say.

"For what reason?"

"In case the commander of the frigate still insists, after learning that we're in a position to make reprisals, on putting his prisoners to death, Mr. Shaw ought to know it as soon as possible."



"He's already done all a man could, an' more than ninety-nine out of a hundred would have figgered as fine. If the scheme don't work, the poor fellows must take their punishment, for we can't help 'em."

"Then the general will come back, if he has any regard for his parole."

"Yes, an' you can make certain the officer in command of the lugger will know what to do with him. There's no good reason for our remainin' idly in port two or three weeks, when we couldn't alter things by so much as the breadth of your finger."

"And this brig?" I asked, with a view to changing the subject of the conversation. "Do you believe that she amounts to very much more than the other vessels we have come across?"

"I reckon we'll have our hands full, lad, in case we succeed in runnin' her down. As we know by experience, some of the frog-eaters will fight, an' it stands to reason that a brave captain would have none but good men under him. We're likely to have our work cut out for us if it so be the privateer heaves in sight."

I was not exactly frightened by the prospect of an engagement; but at the same time it would have been more agreeable if the commander of *L'Aigle*



had not succeeded in winning such a name for himself. In fact, I found myself very near to wishing that we might not be able to find the brig.

Well, in order to save words over matters which are of no especial interest, I will say that on the morning of the third day after leaving port, when the *Enterprise* was standing on a windward tack, we sighted a sail working to leeward; and that she had no idea of trying to give us the slip, was shown when she came about almost at the same moment we did.

The stranger and our schooner were now standing on opposite tacks which must eventually cross, unless, indeed, one or the other changed her course.

There could be no question but that we had sighted a vessel of war, and without being commanded so to do, the crew quietly went about making ready for action.

Half an hour later the lookout reported that the stranger was brig-rigged, and evidently armed.

"We've run down our game," Jethro said to me with a chuckle when this last information was bawled from the masthead. "There are precious few brig-rigged French cruisers in these 'ere parts, an' you can set it down as a certainty that yonder craft is the privateer *L'Aigle*."



"Why might she not be a merchantman?" I asked, smiling, without intending so to do, at his eagerness.

"Because there's no merchantman afloat that would come boldly up to meet a strange vessel, as this fellow is doin'. In fact, 'cordin' to what we've seen, but precious few French cruisers would take the chances."

"But why can't she be an Englishman?" I persisted, and he answered with emphasis:—

"She hasn't the cut of one."

The old man was right, as we understood an hour later, when the Frenchman hoisted his colors in defiance, and we obliged him with a view of ours.

"Unless she's been wrongly described to us, yonder is the chap we're after," Joe Staples said quietly, and then he went to his post, knowing full well we would be sent to quarters before many moments had passed.

When we finally got the word, one could see by the expression on the faces of our officers that they were fully satisfied with the situation, and this fact had a most depressing effect on me; for I realized that there was sharp fighting before us.

We were rapidly nearing the enemy, and that there was on both sides a desire to meet in action, was shown by the course which each was steering.



The helmsmen were doing their best to bring us together as we stood, and there could be no question but that this purpose was soon to be effected.

Our men had been sent to quarters, and we could see that the enemy was in the same situation.

Never before had I witnessed such deliberate preparations for an engagement. Heretofore we had chased our vessel, knowing that she would avoid an encounter if possible; but now I understood that there was no possibility of escaping hostilities, and the cold chills began to run up and down my spine.

Mr. Shaw came among us, speaking a word here, or nodding approbation there, and thus cheering the eager men even more than could have been done by words.

Among all the crew I was the only one who did not look forward with eager anticipations to the conflict, and but for the memory of how Miles Partlett had been treated when he showed the white feather, I might have been foolish enough to think of seeking a hiding-place below the water-line.

Both vessels were clippers; they approached each other like race-horses; and but for the fear in my heart I could thoroughly have enjoyed the marvellous scene before me.



It could now be seen that we would pass the Frenchman to leeward, and Mr. Wadsworth passed the word:—

“Train your guns as soon as may be, lads, for we’ll give and take as we pass.”

There was little need for any such warning; every gunner was fingering his piece nervously, squinting along its length every now and then to make certain it was neither raised too high nor depressed too much.

Near by stood the gun crews, ready to clap on the tackles a second after the engine of death had been discharged; and I, despite my fear, was running fore and aft to make certain there was a sufficiency of ammunition with which to open the engagement.

Then came the moment when our broadside could be brought to bear, and at the same instant that Mr. Wadsworth gave us the word, the enemy’s guns were discharged.

The *Enterprise* quivered from stem to stern under the recoil of her own guns and the blows received from the Frenchman’s missiles, until it was as if we had struck full upon a reef.

Two or three minutes after this, and before I was recovered from my surprise at the fierceness with which the action was begun, I heard our men cheering



furiously, and looked around me in bewilderment to learn the cause.

There was nothing on our deck to cause their cries of joy, and by gazing through one of the ports, I could see *L'Aigle* still holding the same course as when we fired.

The men cheered yet more wildly, and I, stupid through lack of seamanship, took old Jethro by the arm as I asked impatiently:—

“What is it, Master Leighton? What is causing this joy?”

“Poke your head through yonder hatch, an’ find out for yourself, lad.”

“That’s what I have been doing, sir, and yet I do not see anything of importance.”

“A lovely kind of a sailor you’ll make, Paul Burton, if by looking out you don’t see that our commander has put his helm down, and is coming around directly in the wake of the brig, the manoeuvre bein’ hidden, as you might say, by the smoke from her guns.”

I did not understand the matter even then, and a second later Mr. Wadsworth cried sharply:—

“Starboard guns ahoy! Make ready there, for now has come your time!”

It was at last plain to me that the *Enterprise*



had been turned in such a manner that our battery opposite the one which opened the engagement was now ready for use, and I ran across the deck, getting a momentary glimpse of the Frenchman's stern.

To-day, knowing considerably more about the handling of ships in an engagement, I feel the greatest admiration of that commander who fought his schooner as I venture to say never such a craft was fought before.

Four of the guns in the starboard battery raked the enemy fore and aft. Even as the *Enterprise* was heeling to the breeze, and before the smoke of the burning powder shut everything out from view, we could see that the brig's deck bore many a blotch and pool of blood shed by our missiles.

The little *Enterprise* worked so handily, and could be kept so completely under control, that Mr. Shaw let her come quite around on the other tack, running the brig aboard on the weather quarter.

Then, for the first time in my brief experience, did I hear the command of "boarders away!" during an engagement.

As a matter of course, when we were being drilled in such manœuvring, a position had been assigned me by the side of Jethro Leighton. Therefore when



the old man started at full speed to obey, snatching from its rack a boarding pike as he ran, I followed his example in every particular; and we two, with perhaps a dozen others, were ready to leap over the rail just as Joe Staples and his crew had succeeded in making fast the grappling irons.

To our intense surprise, for now did it seem positive we would take part in a most bloody engagement, the brig's colors were hauled down, and the crew retreated backward into the bow of their craft step by step, crying meanwhile for quarter.

Jethro and I had clambered across on to the brig's deck, and involuntarily we halted at this sudden cessation of hostilities.

"It seems that real fightin' strikes to their stomachs mighty quick," the old man cried, and was beginning to complain most bitterly at having thus been cheated by finding the crew ready to surrender when we had counted on their struggling to the last.

Before he was come well into his tirade, however, I saw that on the quarter-deck which caused me to pull the old man around until he also could witness the shocking spectacle.

There, as we could understand full well by their uniforms, lay the commander and the second lieutenant.



ant so seriously wounded that it seemed to me, at the moment, they must be dying, while a short distance away was the lifeless body of the first lieutenant.

With the three commanding officers killed before the engagement was well begun, as you might say, and, probably, when we wore around under the stern in a position to rake, it was little wonder that the crew gave up the struggle at once, for they had suffered most severely, when you take into consideration the fact that but two broadsides had been fired.

Looking forward as I stood like a statue, almost bewildered by the horrors of the scene, I saw three dead sailors, and nine wounded so grievously that they lay prone upon the deck, gasping and groaning with pain.

Of a verity, a battle had been won by skilful seamanship rather than fighting; for had our commander stood on his course after the first broadside, as did the master of *L'Aigle*, then we might have had a day's work cut out for us, with the question unsettled as to who could claim the victory.

Jethro had nothing more to say regarding the cowardice of this particular crew of Frenchmen; but holding up his hand to attract the attention of our commander, he cried out:—



"All the officers are dead or wounded, sir. Our surgeons should be sent at once."

"Ay, ay," Commander Shaw cried, in token that he understood the direful information, and then I heard him giving orders for our surgeons to board the prize.

Afterward, one of the crew who could speak English, told Master Jethro that at the time we raked them they had no idea our schooner was hanging astern; but supposed her to be standing off as was theirs. He said that our first broadside had inflicted no injury save upon the brig herself; but when the second round of shot came aboard, cutting down fifteen on the instant, the terrific slaughter, as well as the surprise, had taken the heart wholly out of the men, and little wonder that it should have been so.

It was necessary now that we throw a prize crew on board, send the prisoners below the hatches, and cast off the grappling-irons in order that the two vessels might separate, because, owing to the heavy sea, they were pounding each other in a manner well calculated to send both to the bottom shortly, unless speedy steps were taken to prevent it.

I, who had not been told off as one of the prize crew, returned to the *Enterprise* just before the ships



were cut adrift, and there, to my surprise, found that three of our people had been wounded by the only broadside fired from the brig.

We had captured the famous cruiser, that vessel whose crew had fought her so nobly as to make her name almost a terror; and yet we could not plume ourselves overly much upon the victory, because it had been brought about by one man's brains rather than force of arms.



## CHAPTER XII

### THE HOSTAGES

**I**NASMUCH as the *Enterprise* had not been injured during this short engagement, there was no necessity for her to put back to port, so far as refitting and repairing was concerned. The little schooner was as bright and fresh after the combat with the privateer who was supposed to be so blood-thirsty, as if there had been no exchange of broadsides, and we were in proper condition to continue the cruise until coming up with that Frenchman who could put us in different trim.

One hour after the action our schooner presented much the same appearance as when she had left the harbor of St. Kitts, save that in the cockpit lay three men, not dangerously, yet quite seriously wounded.

On board *L'Aigle*, however, the situation was quite different. Her cockpit and cabin were well taken up by the wounded, and on the grating aft the French sailmakers, under orders from Commander Shaw, were stitching up the bodies of the lieutenant and three of



his men in new hammocks, for it had been decided that we were to bury the brave fellows before getting under way again.

There is no good reason why I should make any attempt at describing this burial at sea. The ceremony is the same wherever you find Christians, except that under such circumstances as surrounded us at that time, it takes on an added solemnity. During a war one commits the dead to the sea in the presence of those who have good reason to believe that their own shipmates may soon be performing for them the same service, and the words uttered by the chaplain sink deep into a fellow's heart.

We did for those lifeless Frenchmen what we would have done for our own comrades, and all the prisoners were allowed to take part in the ceremonies after having given their paroles to make no attempt at escape.

Once this was over, and the shrouded forms, each weighted with a 6-pound shot lashed to his feet, having been allowed to slide over the gangway with that sullen splash which has a different sound, although I am not able to explain why, from the plunge made by a living being, we clapped on all sail and bore away for St. Kitts.



Commander Shaw had economized the time which would ordinarily have been spent in waiting for the return of the hostages, and all hands could say that it had not been wasted.

Now we were returning to learn whether the commander's scheme had been sufficient to save the lives of our countrymen who had fallen into the hands of the enemy.

We stood off for the port in company, the schooner and the brig, and our people were loud in the praises of this last prize, as well they might have been. Until we captured her I had believed there was never a trimmer, swifter vessel afloat than the *Enterprise*; but *L'Aigle* proved herself a fit mate for our little ship, and might well have been built on the same model, so far as general appearance went.

It would be reasonable to suppose that because of her rig she might slip through the water faster than we could, and yet her pace was no greater, taking into comparison the amount of canvas which could be spread, than ours.

We held our course within half a mile of each other as if yoked together, for the prize crew had reduced the brig's canvas until it was equal to ours; and until midnight every man jack of us watched



the two ships carefully, comparing their good qualities, but without being able to say that one showed herself to be a single whit better than the other.

“You might say they were built in the same yard,” Master Jethro cried enthusiastically, when at the end of two hours the relative positions of the vessels were the same as at the outset. “They’re as near alike as two peas in one pod, an’ how the frog-eaters ever happened to turn out such a hull, beats me. I’m willin’ to bet a penny’s worth of silver spoons against any man’s share of prize money, that it was a Yankee who designed yonder little brig, an’ a Yankee who helped build her.”

As a matter of course all this seemed improbable, and but the boasting of one who believed that his countrymen excel in the fashioning of ships; yet we afterward came to know that Jethro had all unconsciously hit upon the truth.

The brig had been built two years before the beginning of this war which, as I have already said, was really no war at all from a legal standpoint, in Boston, and sold by her owners to French merchantmen. The model upon which she was fashioned had actually been used in the construction of the *Enterprise*, and the result was that, in everything save the rig, the



two vessels were identical; therefore it is little wonder that when each carried the same amount of canvas, they should sail side by side without either gaining half a cable's length the advantage.

When we cast anchor again in the harbor of St. Kitts, the people there must have begun to believe that we came near being a crack crew, for it was now only the middle of June, and in addition to recapturing three American prizes, the *Enterprise* had taken five French privateers.

Already were the men reckoning up roughly what amount of prize money would be divided among the crew; and if even the most modest estimate was correct, then would my share amount to far more than I could have earned ashore in any mechanical pursuit during three or four years.

I was beginning to understand full well how it was that one could be thoroughly infatuated with such a life; for already did I look forward to the time spent in port as just so many days wasted, and an old privateersman could not have been more eager to be in pursuit of the enemy.

There was one thing, however, over which the old shell-backs wagged their tongues furiously, and that was the rapid shrinkage of our working force.



Because of the crews sent on board the prizes, we had but sixty-three men left, and large as was this number compared with the size of the schooner, it would be all too small in case we overhauled a 10- or 20-gun vessel. The *Enterprise* had left port with eighty-one souls on board, and this was considered for purposes of warfare to be the smallest force consistent with the proper handling and fighting of the schooner.

Jethro and Joe Staples, who because of their age and experience were looked upon as authorities in such matters, declared that the time had come when we must of a necessity recruit more men, and how that might be done was the subject of conversation among all hands during such time as we were running back to St. Kitts.

It even presented itself to us as being of more importance than the fate of our countrymen who were held under sentence of death at Guadaloupe, for in case we came upon a ship equal in size and weight of metal to our own, there would be many more lives sacrificed because of our weakness, than if the commander of the frigate carried out the inhuman threats he had made.

On arriving in the harbor of St. Kitts we anchored



inside the lugger, and *L'Aigle* was sent yet nearer the town.

Our men on board the *Bon Ami* cheered us heartily, as well they might, when we came in after so short an absence with such a fine prize; and among those on the quarter-deck I fancied it was possible to recognize the general who had been sent to negotiate the release of our countrymen.

Nor was I mistaken as to this; for as soon as our anchors were let go, a boat put off from the lugger, in which was the French officer and two strangers who had the look to me of Yankees.

To make a dull story short, it is only necessary to say we learned by means of the long-eared marines that the Frenchman in command of the frigate had been frightened by our threat of reprisals, and promptly released his Yankee prisoners on the strength of the general's assurance that Mr. Shaw would send the army officers, which we held, back with him in the felucca.

Because of such surrender our commander immediately set at liberty the men whom he held as hostages, and Mr. Wadsworth escorted them on shore with due ceremony amid the cheers of all the Yankee sailors in the harbor.



By this stroke of business we had not only saved the lives of the poor fellows who were to have been murdered in cold blood, but added two to our crew, since those who had been saved could do no less than ship on board the *Enterprise* during the remainder of the cruise.

By way of celebrating this happy event, and also that our people might have a little jollification over the capture of the redoubtable privateer, we of the *Enterprise* were given a day's liberty, which was spent by visiting the prize crews, pulling to and fro from one vessel to the other with an immense amount of noise. On each craft we wagged our tongues in great style, glorifying Yankee sailors and the Yankee land which was so signally proving itself worthy a place among the nations of the world.

A rare time I had of it, for the men treated me as if my age and experience equalled their own. I was, for the time being, a shipmate in fact, and as can well be fancied, puffed up not a little thereby.

Amid all the pleasures of the day I could not prevent my thoughts from going out again and again to Miles Partlett, who, a prisoner, heavily ironed and closely guarded, was approaching each day nearer to his native land, where he would be brought before



the courts of law on that most disgraceful of all charges—save it be murder itself—treachery.

I pictured him even while exclamations of joy and congratulations were being bandied from one to another, I taking my full share therein, and contrasted his position with my own until my heart grew heavy as lead. If the poor lad could have but held himself steady at his post, having a greater fear of showing the white feather than of being wounded, then might he have stood by my side that day sharing in the festivities.

It was a single cowardly step which had brought all this disgrace upon him, for unless he had given way the first time, everything might have been well; and I realized, if never before, that he who resists at the outset, whatsoever temptation is before him, stands firm thereafter, for there must be a beginning of evil ways, else does one always walk in the true path.

It was on the day after this one when we Yankees swaggered to and fro in the harbor of St. Kitts, celebrating our own achievements, that we came to know how Mr. Shaw proposed to strengthen his crew.

Early in the morning Joe Staples and Jethro Leighton were called aft for an interview with the com-









"EIGHT OF US SET OFF IN THE SCHOONER'S LONG-BOAT."



mander, and when they came forward again with many a swagger of pride, I was the first to learn of the programme which had been arranged.

When they entered the cabin, Mr. Shaw began the interview by explaining what the two old shell-backs already knew, that our crew was so weakened in numbers it had become necessary to find recruits; therefore he proposed that Jethro and Joe Staples should take with them four or five men, and spend the day ashore in the effort to induce such sailormen as they came across to enlist for the remainder of the cruise.

An English commander would have sent out a press-gang regardless of the laws of neutrality, and taken by force such men as he needed; for already had the Britishers practised these high-handed proceedings in the United States; but we Yankees, who counted on setting an example to the other nations of the world — and in which we finally succeeded in proper fashion — went about the task in a legal, manly manner.

To my great delight Master Jethro announced that I was detailed as one of the party, and half an hour later, eight of us set off in the schooner's long-boat for what was neither more nor less, however earnest the purpose, than a day's pleasuring.



I would it were possible for me to describe here all which we saw during this holiday.

St. Kitts, or St. Christopher as it is sometimes called, is one of the Leeward Islands in the West Indies. It is only twenty-three miles long; its greatest breadth being five miles, and the total area only sixty-eight square miles. Made up almost entirely of a mountain range which runs southeast and northwest, the natural scenery is entrancing, particularly to men like us of the *Enterprise*, who had been at sea so long.

The capital of the island, at the head of the harbor, is known as Basseterre, and this is the town in which we spent the day searching for recruits.

Because of the fact that Spanish is the language spoken, Jethro, in making up the party, had selected one among the number who was familiar with that tongue; and this man, acting as interpreter, led the way through those quarters where seamen were known to congregate, making the acquaintance of any who had the appearance of possessing such qualities as we desired in members of our crew.

It seemed to me as if the greater portion of the population were negroes; certainly seven out of every ten sailors we met were black men, and in



trying to gain recruits we made no distinction as to the color of the skin.

Before nightfall we had enlisted fourteen men, sending the first lot aboard the *Enterprise* shortly after noon.

Next day a fresh party was detailed for service, still under charge of Jethro and Staples; but this time I remained on board the schooner.

Before sunset we had in round numbers eighteen new recruits, thirteen of whom were black, and counting the two Yankees released from Guadaloupe, had made up the full complement required to work the schooner in proper shape,—that is to say, eighty-three.

Instead of transshipping the prisoners from the last prize to our own vessel, we sent the able-bodied members of *L'Aigle's* crew on board the lugger, while the wounded were carried ashore.

Next morning the *Bon Ami* and the *Enterprise* got under way, the former bound for some port in the United States, while the latter was to continue her cruise, all hands hoping, and with good reason, that we might fall in with yet more Frenchmen who could be converted into prizes.

Wondering where our next cruising ground would



be, I asked Master Jethro's opinion on the subject, and he promptly announced that Commander Shaw would not be so foolish as to go far afoot when we had been so fortunate among the Leeward Islands.

"You may count it as a fact, lad, that until something different happens, we'll make St. Kitts our rendezvous, for the Frenchmen seem inclined to hang out round there."

"Do you believe that the colored men we have taken on board will do their full duty?" I asked, for it was a matter which had troubled me not a little, and Jethro settled the question to his own satisfaction by saying decidedly:—

"I allow, lad, that they won't come up to the Yankees, an' you might search the world over without findin' the equal of us from the United States, even if I do say it. When a young nation like ours can stand against English an' French ships of war, an' capture or destroy four crafts while losin' one, it's a proven fact that we have in us what you might call sailorly qualities such as are lackin' in others. Now about these 'ere negroes: I allow that they'll do good service as them kind of people go; but don't count on seein' anything very wonderful from 'em, 'cause it ain't in their nature, as you might say. Besides, you



can't expect a foreigner to fight for another country as well as them who were born there. Don't worry your head over what the colored chaps will do, for if we find they're not standin' up like men ought'er, there's enough of us left to put 'em on the right track, or send 'em ashore when next we make port. They'll do the putterin' jobs, which will save the time of our people, an' I reckon sixty-three of us from Boston an' Salem can hold their own against as many Frenchmen as we'll find hereabouts, unless it should so happen the *Enterprise* runs afoul of some frigate like the one at Guadaloupe, which is an accident that ain't likely to occur while we've got sich a commander as Mr. Shaw."

And now am I come to the most glorious portion of my story, for it was on this cruise, when we set out in company with the *Bon Ami*, running her hull down before sunset, that the little *Enterprise* performed that feat which has ever since been spoken of as "one of the handsomest exploits of the war."

If there is one thing more than another which approaches folly, it is that of boasting about one's own achievements; but such a folly I claim cannot be set down to my credit, even when I trumpet the praises of the *Enterprise* the loudest.



That I was on board and numbering as one of the crew when such work as I am about to describe was accomplished, does not go to say that I claim personal credit for anything which was done. It is simply my part to set down what our schooner accomplished in the way of striking a blow against the French maritime power, and I shall hold to the last that never a vessel of our size, with the same number of men we carried, did such valiant work as that same schooner which put to sea from Salem.

Bear in mind that ours was a schooner of but an hundred and sixty-five tons, carrying only twelve light guns, and manned at the most by eighty-three men. In addition to this, remember that we were cruising outside the limits of our own country, putting into so-called neutral ports where, with the possible exception of St. Kitts, almost every man's hand was against us. We had no depot of supplies; no docks of our own in which to refit; no squadron near by to aid in a time of dire necessity; but were forced to depend entirely upon our own exertions, and from the capture of the first prize until that of the last in the war, we never made a home port.

This much, as I have just set down, seems necessary in order to properly "blow the horn" of those



brave fellows who performed such a large share in the work of convincing the French government, that the Yankees as a nation are not to be put upon with impunity by any people whatsoever.

And just one word more, after which I am done with what may seem like boasting, although in reality it is only the plain facts set down in poor words.

Officers of the navy, and shipmasters generally, who must be considered the best judges in such matters, have given again and again to our little schooner *Enterprise* the credit of having done more toward teaching the frog-eaters that lesson which they needed than any frigate in the service; and having stated this, I am saying no more than the gallant craft and brave men deserve.

Now to hark back to the time when we left port in company with our prize, the three-masted lugger, who stood by us only a few hours, after which she was put on a course that finally brought her safely into Boston harbor.

It was the evening of the second day out from St. Kitts, while we were cruising to leeward, when the lookout reported what appeared to be a brig, hull down, and about two points off our port bow.

As nearly as could be made out, the stranger was



twice our size, and it was not reasonable to suppose that so large a merchantman would be found in that vicinity.

The wind was light; but yet we might have clawed off had our commander been so disposed, although I reckon the crew would have been stricken dumb with amazement had they heard the order given which would prove that for the first time the *Enterprise* was about to run away from the enemy.

None of us on the gun-deck, however, believed that Mr. Shaw had any intention of drawing off, even though the stranger was evidently very much heavier than the *Enterprise*.

"Unless she turns out to be a frigate, which don't seem any ways possible, I'm allowin' we'll stand up to her when mornin' comes," Jethro Leighton said to me as if believing I needed encouragement, which was absolutely true, although not of the kind he was ready to give.

Thus far we had come across vessels smaller, or, at least, no larger than ours, and if yonder stranger was twice as big, then it seemed to me a case where discretion was the better part of valor.

"We'll tackle her!" Joe Staples cried exultantly. "Never mind how big she is, we'll tackle her; an' if



it so be they get the best of us, this 'ere schooner has paid for herself two or three times over."

"But there's no sense in taking too many chances," I replied quite sharply. "It is no reason, simply because we have done well, that we should literally throw the schooner away."

"That's not what we're countin' on doin', lad," Jethro Leighton said quickly, and with such a look that I knew beyond a peradventure he was asking himself if I was growing timorous to the verge of cowardice. "Yonder stranger has made us out by this time, an' in case she's an armed vessel, we'll have no trouble in layin' by her till mornin'; but if she's a merchantman, we'll soon see 'em clawin' off."

This last proposition afforded me some little hope, and again and again I went to the masthead in order to inquire of the lookout if the stranger gave any signs of wanting to avoid us.

At the last visit the man dashed all my hopes by saying: "You can set it down as a fact, lad, that she's armed, an' lookin' for jest sich a prize as we'd make, — allowin' that the *Enterprise* was to be whipped, which she ain't. Take a squint over there, an' you'll see she's holdin' the wind while we're losin' it, so if it was in her mind to go away from us, now would be



the time to do it; but, instead, she's crawlin' this way mighty fast."

"And we're doing our best to get at her," I added, forcing a cackle which I counted would sound somewhat like a laugh, as if there was no fear in my heart.

"Ay, lad, we're doin' that same thing; an' what else would you have? The *Enterprise* is out for Frenchmen, an' ready to take 'em whenever they show themselves."

"Oh, it's all right," I replied in what I intended should be a careless tone. "I was only anxious to know if she seemed disposed to give us a chance."

"There's no question about it, lad. Yonder brig is as willin' to come to close quarters as is our schooner, an' we'll soon be runnin' into St. Kitts with her astern, carryin' the stars an' stripes above the tricolor."

This was by no means the information I most desired; but such as it was I forced myself to appear contented, and went down to make report.

Joe Staples and Jethro Leighton were highly elated by the word I brought, and seemingly gave no thought to the fact that the stranger was much larger, and consequently much heavier, than the schooner.

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"If it so be she don't change her mind, we'll have another fling at the Frenchmen, an' perhaps it'll be our luck to meet with such as can hold their own a little longer than them we've already come across," Jethro said. "You know, lad, I'm countin' on your bein' in a fair way for a midshipman's commission before we strike Salem again, an' it's only by tacklin' the ships who ought'er be able to swallow us, that you'll have earned it. Now it seems to me as if this might be your chance."

"Why don't you talk about a commission for yourself, Jethro? You are the one who deserves promotion."

"That may be," the old shell-back said with a laugh; "but men of my age, an' ignorant as I am of school learnin', don't get ahead very fast whatever they're at. An officer aboard a government vessel needs to be pretty much of a scholar, else how's he goin' to work his ship, or keep his accounts? Now. Joe Staples an' I can count the knots on a log-line, an' when that's done, we're through. Bein' too old to lay up any knowledge, we're certain to stay jest where we are, an' younger chaps, who have paid attention to their studies, will jump over our heads."

"The only satisfaction we can get out of it," Joe



Staples added, "is to have somebody we've brought up by hand, so to speak, gettin' the honors; for then we can pick out a little second-handed praise. Jethro an' I have decided that you're the one to do us credit, an' as he says, this may be the chance."

It was foolish talk such as old sailors seem prone to make, and yet at the same time it heartened me wonderfully,—this knowledge that two of the best men on board were looking to me with the idea that by some act of mine they might be benefited in mind, if not in position. In case I should be promoted, they would take the praise to themselves as the result of their individual efforts; and on the other hand, let me show the white feather, and theirs would be the grief.

Therefore it was I promised myself, as I had done many times before, that however great the fear which assailed me, or however imminent the danger by which I might be confronted, there should be no sign of timorousness on my part apparent to those who stood my true friends.



## CHAPTER XIII

### LE FLAMBEAU

**A** GAIN have I allowed myself to set down far too much concerning my own affairs, when it was only of the work performed by the *Enterprise* that I counted on telling.

It may readily be supposed that every member of the crew who was not otherwise engaged, took it upon himself to give some sage opinion regarding the stranger, and what she might possibly do when the morning came.

Not a few argued that as yet she had not sighted the *Enterprise*, therefore the fact of her standing toward us was really no proof as to whether she was an armed vessel or a merchantman, while the majority of our people, in replying to this proposition, declared that if she failed to keep a sharp lookout, it was good proof she was afraid of nothing which might be come across hereabout, whereas a trader would have had his eyes open wide all the time.

As a matter of course the officers knew nothing



of the hot discussion which was continued on the gun-deck; but our commander gave emphatic token of his intentions when he ordered the helmsman to keep the little craft looking toward the stranger all the time, while Mr. Wadsworth had instructions to take advantage of every catspaw of a breeze that might favor us.

The pick of our crew were kept on deck during the entire night, and never once was the brig lost to sight.

When morning came, however, the *Enterprise* was becalmed, and there was not moving air enough to raise the tiny vane at her masthead; but far away, where the spars of the stranger could be seen, the wind was apparently blowing half a gale.

It was odd to see one vessel lying idly on the glassy waters with not so much as a rope-yarn flying, and five or six miles away another ship scudding along with wind enough to make her spars buckle, yet Master Jethro declared he had witnessed the same sight times without number.

"She's within range, so that Mr. Shaw won't have any trouble about manœuvrin'."

"To judge from the canvas she's carrying, one would say that her people were eager to come up



with us," I suggested, my voice trembling slightly as I realized that within a very short time all hands of us might stand face to face with death while trying to deprive others of life.

"I reckon that's about the size of it," Joe Staples said with a chuckle of satisfaction. "They're countin' on our bein' a small Yankee trader who can be picked up without very much bother, an' it would be worth a good bit to see the frog-eaters when they find out that we've got both teeth an' claws."

The crew, without a single exception, behaved as if overjoyed at the prospect before them, and there was no apparent decrease in the general satisfaction when, as the stranger drew nearer, it was learned that she was fully twice as large as the *Enterprise*.

Finally, it was possible for us to make out the number of guns she carried, and we were somewhat surprised at finding that she was pierced for 12's only; but, as Jethro suggested, they were probably considerably heavier than ours.

On she came with a bone in her teeth until not more than a mile and a half distant, when the vane at our masthead began to lift; the smooth water was drawn into thousands of wrinkles by the harbingers



of the coming breeze, and all hands looked eagerly into the approaching wind.

Every rag of canvas that could be set was hoisted, ready for the moment when there should be sufficient movement in the air to fill them, and our people gave vent to exclamations of delight as the sails began to distend.

The little schooner straightened herself out as if eager to be showing what it was possible for her to do, and in a few seconds she had steerageway.

It seemed as if no more than thirty seconds elapsed from the moment we felt the first breath of wind, before the *Enterprise* was heading to cross the stranger's bow, and heeling over to the weight of the breeze till her copper glistened like gold under the rays of the morning sun.

I forgot my nervous forebodings in the mirth excited by the movements of the brig when she saw that we were right eager to come up with her. It seemed almost as if she stood still an instant to get a better view of us, and then off she started on the other tack, running up her studding sails with feverish haste.

"Another Frenchman afraid of his own shadder!" Jethro cried sorrowfully, as the brig showed us her



stern. "I allowed we'd picked up all the cowards that were left in these 'ere parts, an' was overhaulin' them who had some backbone."

"Hold on a minute," Joe Staples cried, as he leaned out of a port that he might get a better view of the enemy. "I ain't willin' to take my 'davy that she's really runnin' away."

"Ain't runnin' away!" Jethro cried scornfully. "What do you call that kind of manoeuvrin'?"

"She's standin' off to get a good look at us."

"Tell that to the marines, not to sailormen what know when a craft is doin' her best to get out of the way. Why don't she show her colors, if she's willin' to give us half a chance? When a brig of three hundred tons or more comes across a toy schooner like this 'ere vessel, I don't allow there's any great call to get a good look at her."

"Most likely she's heard of what we've been doin' hereabout, an' kind er wants to get a general idee of our build. We'll have a chance before nightfall to taste the quality of her gunners, or I'm a Dutchman, which I ain't."

It certainly did appear to me as if the brig was trying to give us the slip; but an old sailorman like Joe Staples should have had a better idea of the



manœuvring than a greenhorn like myself, and I took his opinion in preference to Jethro's, for by this time the latter was too angry to be quite himself.

Ten minutes later the Frenchman ran up his colors, and we gave him a sight of our own, after which we were treated to as pretty a bit of seamanship as I ever saw in my life.

It was evidently the intention of the enemy to learn whether he could run away from us at will, in case he did not succeed in getting the best of the schooner at the outset; for French sailors are mighty careful about taking any chances.

The brig's captain evidently believed his vessel was faster on than off the wind, therefore he gradually hauled up and boarded his starboard tacks without waiting to haul down his studdingsails, which last was not done until his vessel was close by the wind.

The suddenness of this manœuvre, and the previous position of the two ships, brought the *Enterprise* right astern, when she hauled up in the wake of the enemy.

In this manner was the chase continued, and a few moments later it became clear to all that our schooner could overhaul the brig in short order.

"We'll have them under our guns within half an hour, whether they like it or not!" Jethro cried



triumphantly; and again Joe Staples insisted that the brig was willing enough to measure strength with us, but had only hauled up in order to gain an advantage.

Although all hands knew that an action in which the odds would be against us was close at hand, those old shell-backs set about arguing, each stoutly maintaining his own opinion, and the greater number of the crew took one side or the other, until the gun-deck hummed as if a thousand swarms of bees had suddenly taken possession of it.

While they jawed and wrangled we overhauled the chase, until the marines were ordered forward; for by this time we were within musket-shot of the brig Commander Shaw counted on capturing.

The Frenchman opened the engagement with a smart volley of musketry, since it was not possible to use his big guns; and it was comical to see our old fellows scuttling away, each to his post, without waiting to decide who had the best of the argument.

Our marines returned the fire promptly, and it was an odd sensation to find an action at sea opened by small arms, while the gunners remained idle, unable to bring a single piece to bear on the enemy.



We picked off two helmsmen during this portion of the affair, while it was well-nigh impossible for the frog-eaters to see a target, because our people were sheltered in a certain fashion by the schooner's bow; but this kind of work was not to Mr. Shaw's liking, although had it continued sufficiently long we could have reduced their force very cleverly.

Within ten minutes after the firing began we were so close aboard the brig that our jib-boom was directly over her taffrail, the schooner standing directly in her wake, when the order was given by the commander for us to keep off that we might draw more on the enemy's beam.

While doing so we necessarily exposed ourselves to a broadside from the Frenchman, who took prompt advantage of the opportunity, with the result that two of our men were killed outright, while another was put out of the battle with a shattered leg.

"What about their fightin' now?" Joe Staples asked, when we had let fly a broadside within pistol-shot distance, for he was not disposed to cease his argument even during the heat of battle.

"I'll tell you better in an hour's time, for she should be able to hold us off that long," Jethro replied grimly, and then there was no further oppor-



tunity for jawing, because we were in the midst of as hot an engagement as I had ever seen.

Fancy two vessels firing six guns at a time within such short range, and you may have some idea of the deafening and constant roar. Add to that the splintering of wood, the groans of the dying, which we could hear from the enemy as well as among ourselves; the shrieks of the wounded, mingled with sharp cries of command or the slatting of blocks and sheets, and some faint conception may be had of that severe engagement wherein men were falling like over-ripe apples during a high wind.

That I was frightened goes without saying. It was almost possible to feel the flame of our adversary's guns, and there was no place on board where one might count himself safe.

My heart was cowardly in the extreme; but I forced myself to the realization that a fellow would be in no more danger in one place than another, and staggered here or there as duty demanded, expecting each instant I would be struck by a flying splinter or solid shot.

The most murderous missile sent on board of us, although by no means the worst so far as the schooner was concerned, came in on the port quarter and



ploughed its way directly across the cockpit, killing two poor wretches who were under the knives of the surgeons.

It seemed to me as if we had been engaged in this carnage half a lifetime, when a shout from our people told that the brig had got a full dose and was trying to claw off.

He attempted to escape by hauling close by the wind, making sail and tacking, and as he did so the *Enterprise* was brought around in pursuit; but a groan went up from our old shell-backs when, for the first time since she was launched, the little schooner missed stays.

Every one was craning his neck to see how the commander would get out of the scrape which was like to cost us considerable ground; but in Mr. Shaw we had an officer who was not liable to be rattled by any small matter.

As calmly and quietly as if sailing into some friendly harbor, our commander ordered the sails trimmed anew, and stood patiently waiting until the *Enterprise* had gained sufficient way, when he put her around on the same tack with the enemy.

Twenty men or more had left their stations to see what might be the result of the mishap, having done



so because of their intense desire to capture the brig, and not with any idea of acting mutinously or disobediently.

The officers understood this full well, for instead of flinging sharp reprimands or threats at our heads, the word was quietly given for all hands to go to quarters again, and we knew that in a few moments more, so much superior was the schooner to the brig in point of sailing, we should be in the thick of it again.

The brief time at our disposal was employed in clearing the deck from the raffle with which it was covered, strewing fresh sand on those places where the life blood of our brave fellows was standing almost in pools, and swabbing the heated guns.

We had no more than made ready for a renewal of the conflict, each man working to the utmost of his strength and speed, when the *Enterprise* was within range once more.

That the brig's fore-topmast had been wounded we knew full well, because of seeing a dozen men aloft trying to secure the spar; and it was with the hope of dismasting her that our gunners aimed a trifle higher than before.

The smoke of the guns had not yet cleared when,



without warning, we were struck by a heavy squall, and in the twinkling of an eye the enemy's fore-topmast was carried away with the men still upon it.

We had a good seaman on board our vessel in the shape of Mr. Shaw; but the commander of the brig must have been very nearly his equal, as was shown when he put up his helm in order to run away from the wreckage, leaving it directly in our course.

It was necessary we allow the schooner to fall off, else had we been hampered by the raffle to such an extent that perhaps an hour might have been spent before we could clear the schooner from the network of spar and cordage.

Again it was that Mr. Shaw showed his superior seamanship as well as his humanity.

He knew full well that we might lay by half an hour and yet come up with the chase again, therefore the *Enterprise* was rounded to, the crew of the long-boat called away, and we ceased fighting in order to save the lives of those Frenchmen who had been carried overboard with the spar.

I am of the belief, and now at this late day Jethro Leighton admits it is possible I may be in the right, that our commander's coolness in stopping to save life when we had been so eager to take it, did more



toward proving to the frog-eaters our confidence in the outcome of the struggle than anything else could have done, and they actually dared not contend very much longer against those who were ready to perform such humane deeds.

However that may be, we saved the Frenchmen to make prisoners of them; and immediately our boat had been hoisted inboard, the schooner filled away, ranging up once more to the beam of the brig.

This short respite from the sharp fighting had only served to give me a better idea of the danger which threatened; and when, seemingly, we were about to renew the action, I covered my eyes with my arm, — perhaps the most foolish thing a timorous lad could do, for one fears less the danger which can be seen than that which he imagines.

I was not allowed to remain ignorant of what was going on, however, for even while I stood waiting to hear another broadside from one vessel or the other, our crew began to shout like madmen, and looking up, I saw the French colors fluttering down from the masthead in token that the brig was our prize.

Without going into all the details of that which happened immediately after the enemy struck, I will



say that we had taken a vessel decidedly our superior in force, and a cruiser of yet greater renown than *L'Aigle*.

She was *Le Flambeau*, carrying twelve French 9's, and one hundred and ten men.

We had more reason to be proud than ever before; and as events proved later, our government recognized fully the importance of the work done that day.

It cannot be said, let Jethro Leighton cry out all he pleases against the courage of the French, that the crew of the brig had shown themselves cowardly. Fear had no part or parcel in this victory of ours; *Le Flambeau* had struck simply because she was beaten, and those on board who were yet able bodied, understood this fact quite as well as did we when we learned the result of the engagement.

Twenty-two corpses were brought to the upper deck by us when we were making the prize ready for the voyage to St. Kitts. Twenty-two corpses and eighteen wounded men! A total of forty out of an hundred and ten!

Surely that was sufficient proof that we whipped the enemy handsomely, and owed no portion of our victory to their timorousness.



Whether it was that the French were poor marksmen, I cannot say; but our advantage in the combat had been at no single time greater than theirs, and yet we had but five killed and five wounded, while according to their own statements, they had poured into us a greater number of shot than we had into them.

A landsman would have said that the prize was virtually wrecked, because of the loss of her top hamper; but this was as nothing compared with the damage done her hull.

She had been struck 'twixt wind and water nine times, and if that squall which carried away the spar had been the forerunner of a gale, she must have foundered before we could put her in trim.

The *Enterprise* suffered but little in comparison with the enemy. As a matter of course her rigging was cut again and again; but the hull had received only two severe wounds, although the port rail was splintered for a length of twenty feet, and these splinters it was which struck six out of our ten killed or disabled men.

We were forced to heave both vessels to, and remain there until the following morning before it was safe to get under way again, and during that time twenty



or more of the French prisoners aided us in the arduous labor, having volunteered so to do.

This struck me as odd, that men could fight desperately one moment and be apparently friendly the next, for the frog-eaters who labored with our crew grinned and chattered as if in the highest spirits, although their lingo was not understood save by few.

When, the task having been performed, we were shaping a course for St. Kitts once more, I put it plainly to Master Jethro, asking him to tell me how it could be possible that people who had striven desperately to kill each other, could, with the simple falling of a flag, act in a friendly fashion.

"It's a way these 'ere frog-eaters have," the old man replied sagely. "Them as can fight are reg'lar cats at it, an' never give up till the last gun is fired. What's more, they enjoy comin' across others who'll stand up to 'em, even as much as do the Yankees. Then, when they're through blood-lettin', it's a case of wantin' to make friends all 'round. Why, I've seen two of 'em stand up for a five-round fight, say, an' kiss each other between whiles. They're queer cattle, Paul, queer cattle. I've got a fairly friendly feelin' for decent frog-eaters; but when they're cowardly, they're the faintest-hearted men that ever lived."



I am not prepared to say that Jethro Leighton's opinion of the French people is correct, because my acquaintance with them only extends to such prisoners as I have aided in guarding or feeding; but this I know beyond a peradventure, that in our last two prizes we found enemies who were gluttons at fighting, although they might have been better marksmen.

In order to avoid running away from our prize, and at the same time take precautions against her recapture, we shortened sail on the schooner while making the port of St. Kitts, and thus it chanced that at the end of twenty hours, she was hull down ahead of us.

We of the crew were counting, as a reward for the last action, on enjoying shore liberty as soon as the anchor was down, for the recruits picked up at Basseterre had promised to show us all the sights of the town, which was much to our liking, as can well be fancied when you take into consideration the fact that it was now June, and we had been ashore but twice since the latter part of December.

It was while our shipmates were laying out a programme for the visit in case we were so fortunate as to have a few days which could be spent in idleness, that a sail was reported, standing off to the



eastward, and, as a matter of course, in a moment all was excitement among us.

Inasmuch as the sighting of this stranger proved to be only an incident, and not that which led up to an action, I will pass over with but few words the eighteen hours we spent in pursuit; for within a short time after the lookout had hailed, it was apparent the chase was doing her best to draw away from us.

During the remainder of this day and all the night, we kept on, holding the stranger steadily in sight, and gaining upon her, until we made her out to be barque rigged and having much the look of a Yankee vessel.

Then, the wind having died away somewhat, we overhauled her more rapidly, until she was brought to by a shot pitched over her bow, and we found that while there was no prize money to be gained, we had done good service for our country.

The stranger was the barque *Red Cloud* from Boston, on a voyage around the Horn, and had been captured four and twenty hours previous by the same cruiser we were then sending into port—*Le Flambeau*.

On board the prize was a crew of twelve French-



men, and as prisoners the former crew, — twenty seamen, four officers, and a small lad by the name of Ammi Merrill, who, according to the articles, had shipped as cabin-boy, steward's assistant, or whatsoever by way of duty should come within the range of his ability.

I was on the barque's deck when the rightful crew of the vessel was brought up from below, having smuggled myself on board the boat which carried Mr. Wadsworth to the recaptured craft; and Jethro, who had been detailed to release the Yankees, shouted to me as the poor fellows came up from the hold: —

“Here's a comrade for you, Paul Burton, an' I reckon you might make somethin' out of him if he has a mind to turn privateersman instead of loafin' around on a trader.”

It was Ammi whose head appeared above the hatch-combing as the old sailorman hailed me; and I immediately took a great fancy to the lad, who seemed as much out of place among shell-backs as a girl in a cow pasture, although at the moment I had no idea that we would ever become shipmates.

The lad looked as if he had been crying his eyes out, and I can well fancy he had shed a good many



tears at the idea of spending weary days, perhaps months, in a French prison.

Seeing in me a boy of about his own age, he came quickly forward with outstretched hand.

“Do you belong aboard the war vessel?” he asked, and it was with considerable pride that I answered in the affirmative.

“Have you ever been in a battle?”

Then I allowed myself to put on airs, and answered as if taking part in an engagement was a trifling matter:—

“Dozens of them.”

Ammi gazed at me in open-mouthed astonishment, and at that moment Mr. Wadsworth called us away, for the Frenchmen who made up the prize crew were to be taken as prisoners on board our schooner.

While I stood near the rail with the others from the *Enterprise*, aiding in sending the prisoners over the rail into our boat which lay alongside, it was possible to see the captain of the barque lead the boy well aft as if for a private interview.

It looked to me as if the lad stood in fear of the commander, and I fancied that he was of the mind to run away; but the master of the barque held him fast by the arm while he talked earnestly and with



what had much the appearance of threatening gestures.

Finally I saw Ammi hold up his hand, after the manner of one who makes oath to a statement; and when this movement had been repeated twice over, the captain went up to our second lieutenant in what I thought was far from a respectful fashion, as he asked:—

“There must be a chance for you to send a man or two back to the States now and then, eh?”

“We do have such opportunities when the number of our prisoners is so great that it becomes necessary to get rid of a cargo.”

“Well, what’s the matter with your takin’ that boy along? He’s been homesick ever since we left Boston, an’ ain’t worth the salt that goes into his bread. I didn’t know but that the little shaver would die before we’d been eight an’ forty hours out of port, an’ he came mighty near goin’ into convulsions when the privateer sent a couple of shot aboard.”

Mr. Wadsworth hung in the wind, as well he might after the experience with Miles Partlett, whereupon, as Ammi came toward me with an imploring look, I took his arm with no little flourish, as if to say that I would become responsible for him.



Whether or no this decided our second lieutenant, it is impossible for me to say; but at all events he replied to the captain of the *Red Cloud*:—

“I’ll send word when the prisoners are taken aboard the schooner, and learn if our commander is willing to relieve you of the boy.”

It was Jethro whom Mr. Wadsworth selected as a messenger to Commander Shaw, and before the old man went over the rail I whispered in his ear:—

“In case the commander gives you a chance, say a good word for the lad.”

“What’s the matter with you now?” Jethro asked gruffly. “Haven’t we had enough in the way of boys already?” and I knew he was thinking of Miles Partlett.

“This lad is of a different sort, Master Jethro, and I am certain he and I will get along right well. It will be doing him a big favor; and if you’re afraid of his turning timorous, there’s no need of calling upon him to take part in an action. *Do* say what you can in his behalf if you have an opportunity.”

Jethro made no promises; but when the prisoners had been put on board the *Enterprise*, and the boat was returned to carry back Mr. Wadsworth and those of us who yet remained on board the barque, the old sailor said to the second lieutenant:—



"The commander says, sir, that you may bring the lad, if it so be the master of this 'ere barque wants to send him home. I am to report that he's not comin' with us as one of the crew; but only a spare hand until we run across a ship sailin' for a home port."

"That satisfies me, so that I can get the little shaver started toward the United States," the merchantman's captain said, and without waiting for further parley I led Ammi over the rail into the boat which was laying alongside.

Then it was that the *Red Cloud's* captain came toward us, as if suddenly determined not to part with the boy, and the little fellow clung to my arm with a faint cry; but no word was spoken, for our sailors were tumbling in upon us, eager to be aboard their own vessel once more.



## CHAPTER XIV

### RETAKING PRIZES

NOT until the crew had followed us into the boat which was to carry Mr. Wadsworth back to the schooner, did I realize that we were bringing Ammi away empty handed, when the lad should have some dunnage; and once this occurred to me I cried to our second lieutenant, who was coming over the rail:—

“We haven’t got Ammi’s belongings, sir.”

Mr. Wadsworth looked at me blankly, not understanding at once the meaning of my words, and the *Red Cloud’s* captain said curtly:—

“I reckon the boy hasn’t got anything aboard that’s worth the carryin’ away.”

At the same time Ammi plucked at my sleeve as he said in a low tone:—

“Don’t stop; let us get to your vessel as soon as possible. There is nothing aboard the ship belonging to me.”

“But surely you must have some dunnage,” I said



stupidly, allowing myself to be dragged down on to the thwart; whereupon he shook his head like one who could explain the situation if he felt so disposed, and again there came into my mind the thought that we were doing something more than taking charge of a lad who had grown homesick.

I felt certain there was something of a mystery connected with the case, and wondered if it might be that this innocent-looking lad was leagued with others in trying to play us a trick.

However, it was really none of my business to ask questions then if Mr. Wadsworth's curiosity was not aroused, and I remained silent, watching the expression of wondrous relief on the lad's face as our men pulled smartly away from the ship.

Once on board the *Enterprise*, and after having shown Ammi where he could swing his hammock, I proposed to my new comrade that he spend the time as best pleased him on deck, pretending that important duties prevented my remaining with him just then.

The schooner was under way once more. Already the barque had swung off on her true course, and was to the vision hardly more than a white cloud four or five miles distant.



Then I took Jethro Leighton to a secluded spot between two of the guns where we might converse privately, and asked if he had noticed anything peculiar when the captain of the *Red Cloud* called Ammi aside before learning whether it was Mr. Shaw's pleasure to take the lad on board our schooner, whereupon the old sailor said emphatically:—

“Ay, Paul, that I did; an' you may make up your mind that there's somethin' betwixt this new shipmate of yours an' the master of the merchantman, which hasn't yet been told.”

“It has seemed somewhat like that to me; but yet how is it possible that the captain of a ship and a cabin-boy should have secrets in common?”

“Now you've got me, lad; that's way out of my course, an' we needn't spend a great deal of time tryin' to come back to it, 'cause nothin' will be known until the boy himself makes ready to put confidence in us.”

“He doesn't seem inclined to talk overly much.”

“That's 'cause he's like a cat in a strange garret as yet. Wait till he's been on board the schooner a week or two, an' I'll answer for it he tells the whole story.”

Ammi was leaning over the starboard rail forward



when next I saw him, gazing at the horizon line, and I asked carelessly if he was straining his eyes in the hope of seeing the United States, whereupon he shook his head mournfully as he replied:—

“I’m not such a softy as to think I’ll be within sight of my own country for many a long, weary day yet; but now that I’m on board a war vessel, surely the time must come when I’ll be steering a true course for home.”

“And perhaps you haven’t so long to wait, my boy,” I said, trying to give him all the encouragement possible. “We’ve got a good number of prisoners on our hands, and since the authorities at St. Kitts won’t allow them to be landed there, we shall be sending a cargo into New York or Boston pretty soon. How did it happen that you shipped on board the *Red Cloud* without an outfit?” I asked, giving words to the question which held possession of my mind.

“I didn’t,” the lad replied so decidedly that I looked at him in surprise.

“Then we left your dunnage aboard the barque after all?”

“I hadn’t any.”

“Look here, Ammi,” I began, unwilling to wait



longer before trying to come at the bottom of what seemed positive was a mystery. "Tell me what you mean by saying that you didn't ship without an outfit, and yet nothing of yours was left behind."

"I never shipped aboard the *Red Cloud* at all, but was taken against my will."

"Do you mean that a press-gang gathered you in?" I asked in bewilderment.

The boy shook his head; and when I urged more definite answers to my questions, he said in a low tone, as if afraid of being overheard:—

"The captain made me promise not to tell."

"Do you mean that you are never to say a word about your setting out on a voyage around the Horn?"

"Of course I can tell the story when we get home, as I must; but I believe the captain was afraid this schooner would go in pursuit of him if I let her commander know how I was taken on board."

It did not seem hardly fair for me to press the lad further when he was so unwilling to explain what I had now begun to believe was a wrong done him, and therefore the conversation came to an end for the time being.

Ammi's hammock was slung next to mine, and four



and twenty hours had not passed before we were firm friends, with nothing save this one secret between us.

He told me of his mother who, from all I could gather, had no knowledge of where he was, and spoke of the great happiness which would be his when he should be with her once again. Although not nearly as large as I, he was of the same age, and yet attending school when he went, or was taken by force, on board the *Red Cloud*.

He had an uncle living in Boston whose property was invested in shipping, and of him he stood greatly in fear, as I gathered.

Well, I had ceased to ply the boy with questions, believing, as did Jethro, that in a short time he would voluntarily tell me his story, and had settled down to the routine of sea life once more when, twenty hours after overhauling the *Red Cloud*, we hove in sight another sail.

This time it was a brig — a lumbering, apple-bowed old hooker which was doing her best to crawl away from us to leeward, and off we put in pursuit, as was our duty.

The chase sailed more like a scow than a properly constructed sea-going craft, and in less than two



hours we had her hove to a cable's length to leeward.

She proved to be the *Amelia*, from Philadelphia to Liverpool, and had been captured by *L'Aigle* three days previous.

A prize crew had been trying to take her into Guadaloupe; but making more leeway than headway, she had slid off her course until no one can say where she might finally have brought up but for our interference.

As in the case of the *Red Cloud*, her proper crew was under the hatches, and six of the privateersmen were doing their best to handle her.

We took the Frenchmen aboard and gave the master of the brig permission to go wherever he pleased; but as Jethro said, he was more likely to go wherever the brig pleased, for she would neither stand up to the wind, nor make much headway when running full before it, and it was a mystery to all hands of us why such a clumsy vessel should be used for any other service than that of a lighter.

"Well, the frog-eaters have taken five prizes that they won't get into port, thanks to us," Jethro said as we parted company with the brig, "an' if matters go on at this rate, I'm not certain but it would be a



good idee to leave the privateers alone, an' quietly gather in whatsoever Yankee vessels they may take. There would be no risk in sich kind of work, an' we'd gain anywhere from six to a dozen prisoners every haul."

"Yes, that kind of business would suit you to a dot, Jethro Leighton, after all your grumblin' because the enemy won't stand up to their guns!" Joe Staples interrupted. "You'd be the first to cry out against it, an' yet you never had a better idee in your life. We could cruise around here in clover, by runnin' away from anything near our own size, without wastin' a grain of powder or a single shot."

Then the two old men fell to chaffing each other, much to the amusement of their messmates, who on such occasions were always interested listeners, and as a rule, were well repaid for the expenditure of time.

If left to myself, I believe that all unwittingly this yarn would be spun out until never a book could be made large enough to contain it, so nearly is it a labor of love for me to set down that which was said and done on board the *Enterprise*.

I would that I might repeat the most trifling conversation among the men, for then could one the better understand in what perfect harmony we lived,



and how thoroughly each stood friend to the other, while all were jealous of the schooner's reputation, until that which was an affront to one was picked up by the entire crew.

I am in duty bound, however, to bring this tale to a close within a certain limit, both as regards time and space, therefore the briefest mention shall be made of two more American prizes to the French which we recaptured and sent about their business, while we took eleven prisoners from both vessels.

Surely it seemed by this time that we must have released all the vessels *L'Aigle* had captured, for there were now thirty-four prisoners in our hold, which was quite as many as the privateer could have spared from her crew in order to have remaining the number that was on board when we fought her.

Again was a squad told off to act as sentinels over the prisoners, and Ammi Merrill and I were detailed to the disagreeable task of furnishing them with food and water.

We spent thirty-six hours making the distance from where the last Yankee was retaken to the harbor of St. Kitts, and during that time the lad who had been transferred from the *Red Cloud* had come to have the



most implicit confidence in my friendship, through being thrown so much in my company, as I fancied.

We two lads were forced to spend no less than two-thirds of our time in the dark hold, and I, thinking it might be a good idea to put into his mind that which would prevent him from giving way to cowardice, however weak kneed he felt, told the story of Miles Partlett's disgrace and crime.

It was on the night before we entered port that Ammi finally decided to put me in possession of his sad story.

We had made St. Kitts near about sunset; but as the wind held light there appeared to be no chance we could come to our anchorage before midnight, and Ammi, who had a boy's curiosity for seeing any new or strange place, proposed that we remain awake until the schooner had let go her ground-tackle.

Nothing loath, I agreed, and we sat well forward on the main deck, sheltered from the wind by the rail, gazing at the stars or enjoying the motion as the little *Enterprise* leaped from one surge to another; but holding no converse until Ammi asked abruptly:—

“How far away do you allow the *Red Cloud* is by this time?”



"That's a question I can't answer; but it is certain that if you ever see her again, it won't be until a couple of years have passed."

"Are you positive of that?" he asked earnestly.

"Why, of course I am, lad, if it so be she rounds Cape Horn. Two years isn't very long for such a voyage as that."

"But there's no danger she'll put back?" he asked, rather than stated.

"You can make certain that, once having been made a prize, the captain will take good care to get out of this vicinity as quickly as possible. Were you afraid he might overhaul us before you could be sent home?"

"That has been in my mind," Ammi replied, "and the reason why I haven't explained how I chanced to be on board the barque, is that he made me promise not to tell any one my story until he was so far away there could be no danger of pursuit."

"And you really promised?" I asked, thinking the lad was foolish to bind himself in the least degree, however slight, when the *Enterprise* lay near by to take a hand in the matter if by any chance he had been ill used.



"I was obliged to promise, otherwise he wouldn't have let me come with you."

"If you hadn't signed articles aboard the *Red Cloud*, I don't know how he could have prevented you from doing as you pleased."

"He declared it would be possible to stop me, and I was perfectly willing to make any agreement whatsoever in order to leave that ship."

"Some day, when the time is ripe for it, I reckon you'll be willing to tell me how you happened to be among that crew."

"If it is positive we won't come upon the *Red Cloud* again, I am ready to tell it now," he replied thoughtfully. "There isn't much of a story — at least, not a great deal that I can understand myself. Of course there was some reason for it all, but I haven't been able to figure it out. I was going to school one day, when I met my uncle, Ira Merrill, who asked why I hadn't been down to his office for some time. I explained that in order to hold a good standing with my class, much extra study had been necessary, and therefore I couldn't spend the time. He insisted that I accompany him then in order to get some papers which he wanted me to deliver to my mother, promising at the same time that he would



go himself, or send some one with me, to explain to the teacher why I was late at school.

“Uncle Ira is my father’s half-brother, and I knew that between him and mother there had been trouble about business matters after father’s death; but he came to see us now and then, and inasmuch as he was a near relative, there seemed to be no reason why I should not obey. I went to his office, and from there he took me on board the *Red Cloud*, where he said we would find the papers. You must know that she is one of his ships; my father owned half of her before he died. We went into the saloon, and Uncle Ira summoned Mr. Nelson, the captain. Then I was sent into a small cabin off the saloon, because, as my uncle explained, he wanted to speak privately with Mr. Nelson.

“There I stayed until it seemed as if two hours or more had passed, and thinking they must have forgotten me, I attempted to go out. The door was locked; I pounded and shrieked, but all to no purpose, and while I was trying to make some one hear, the ship was got under way. The next day Captain Nelson told me that I had been shipped as cabin-boy and steward’s assistant; that my mother, wanting to bring me up as a sailor, had consented to



this plan lest I should object; but the steward afterward told me it was his opinion I had been regularly kidnapped."

"Did they treat you badly?" I asked, wondering if it could be possible this lad's story was true.

"At first the captain was very severe, and once knocked me down the companionway, when for a time he believed I was dead. After that it seemed much as if he had repented being so brutal; and while we were prisoners in the hold, having been captured by the Frenchmen, he promised faithfully that whenever it should be possible to send me back to Boston he would do so, with the understanding that I allow Uncle Ira to believe I had made my escape unaided.

"When your vessel retook ours, I believed my time had come, and then it was Captain Nelson declared I should not be allowed to leave him. Only when I found courage to declare my intention of appealing to the captain of this schooner, did he consent, and then, as I have said, I was forced to promise that I would not tell the story until he was so far away that there could be no chance to capture him. I am still bound to repeat to Uncle Ira that I contrived to bring about my own liberty."



"Can't you guess why they took so much trouble to get you out of Boston?" I asked in perplexity.

"No, and I have tried very hard to work it out in my mind. Of course I know positively that my mother never sent me to sea in any such fashion, and she must be grieving her heart out now, unless Uncle Ira has told her everything."

"And you can set it down as a fact that he hasn't told her anything about it!" I cried, growing angry at learning of such villany. "It is all some scheme of his to get possession of your father's property."

"I don't know," Ammi replied, shaking his head doubtfully. "It doesn't seem as if a man would so wrong his brother's son simply for the sake of money."

"But such things have been done!" I cried hotly. "Look here, Ammi, suppose you tell this story to Jethro; he's a master hand at getting at the bottom of such matters, and besides, you'll need a friend like him when you get back to Boston."

"But I'm counting on being there long before the schooner arrives. There should be a chance, if you are sending prisoners home, for me to get a passage."



I insisted that whether he went with us, or was sent on one of the prizes, it would be a great advantage to tell Jethro Leighton of the villany which had been practised; and finally, after many an argument, he agreed with me.

We found Jethro and Joe Staples together, and I saw no reason why both should not listen to the recital of Ammi's wrongs, while he, having decided to repeat the tale, made no hesitation because there were two listeners instead of one.

The story was told the second time almost in the same words I had heard it; and once the lad had come to an end, the two old shell-backs sat there smoking furiously, but never saying a word.

"Well?" I asked impatiently, having counted on hearing them explain at once why the lad had been kidnapped, and disappointed because they remained silent.

"It's an odd yarn," Jethro said sagely. "I can't seem to make head or tail out of it, though if Ammi knew more about his father's business, I reckon it might be plain. Howsomever, there's no hurry, seein's how the lad is bound to stay with us for a spell, so Joe an' me will turn it over in our minds till we come to somethin' in the way of an opinion."



"I'm thinkin' that it would be a good idee to take Mr. Wadsworth into the secret," Staples said after a brief time of silence. "This 'ere lad is under the protection of our commander, so to speak, seein's he's been brought aboard the *Enterprise*, an' it stands us in hand to make sich arrangements as will prevent any funny business bein' done when he goes ashore. Let us figger that this 'ere Uncle Ira wanted to get rid of his nevy, an' he happened to see him when the boy first goes ashore after arrivin' home. Why, it stands to reason he's bound to kidnap him agin, for a man who claims to be honest couldn't afford to have sich a story as that told about him. This 'ere trick is mighty deep, Jethro Leighton, an' I ain't so certain as we two old barnacles have got the heads on our shoulders to carry it through shipshape."

I was also of the opinion that very much care must be exercised when Ammi first returned, lest he find himself in yet greater difficulties than before. But it was doubtful if he would consent to letting so many into the secret, and therefore, in order that Master Staples and Jethro might do whatsoever they thought best without being hampered by any commands from Ammi, I proposed that the lad and I go



forward again, for by this time we were entering the harbor.

It was much as if the boy felt great relief of mind after having confided to others the story of his wrongs, but he made no further mention of the matter during the next eight and forty hours.

We two lads remained on deck that night until the *Enterprise* was come to an anchor among her prizes, and been received with hearty cheers by the crews of the three captured vessels, after which we turned in.

Next morning we had visitors almost without number. The people of Basseterre had come by this time to understand that the Yankees were making the Frenchmen look foolish, for I venture to say that never before had so many prizes been brought into that port by a single vessel; therefore, for the purpose of showing themselves friendly to men who could accomplish so much with so little at their disposal, the citizens set about making our acquaintance, and as a matter of course, we of the gun-deck were only too well pleased at being entertained.

That portion of our crew which had been shipped from Basseterre did not forget the promise made; therefore while the work of covering the wounds



inflicted by *Le Flambeau* was being performed, we decided that a certain number of men should ask each day for shore liberty, and that every party thus made up have among it two or more of those who were acquainted in the town.

Commander Shaw was as great a stickler for discipline as ever paced a quarter-deck; but he also had the good sense to understand that all work and no play makes Jack a dull fellow; therefore when our request was sent aft, he very readily agreed to it, and from that hour a dozen or more of us were continually on shore, enjoying ourselves in a most sailorly fashion.

It was eight and forty hours before any mention was made of the story told by Ammi, and then Joe Staples and Jethro called us two lads near one of the open ports where we could talk without danger of being overheard, while at the same time we enjoyed the cooling breezes which came in upon us.

It was Master Leighton who began the conversation by saying:—

“We have had a confab with Mr. Wadsworth, an’ he has said somethin’ about it to the commander.”

Ammi looked up quickly at the old sailor, who had suddenly paused as if this was the extent of the



information he intended to give, whereupon Joe Staples took up the part of spokesman.

"It's agreed by the officers, an' I'm thinkin' much the same as they do, that it would be mighty dangerous to send you home in one of the prizes without first makin' such arrangements as should put a stopper on any evil thing your uncle might try to work."

He paused, and Jethro continued:—

"To whittle down the yarn, it stands like this, lad: The commander believes you're forced to stay aboard of us until we run afoul of some other naval vessel bound for home; but in the meantime, that is to say to-day, you're to write a long story to your mother, tellin' her exactly where you are, an' under whose care. Mr. Shaw will have the letter sent to Boston, for the idee now is that *L'Aigle* is to get under way for that port within four an' twenty hours."

"That will ease up your mother's heart," Joe Staples interrupted. "She won't be botherin' about you; but in case she has got any head for business, will be lookin' after matters to your benefit, an' take care that your precious uncle's eye-teeth are pulled."

"It's the only safe plan, my lad," Jethro added earnestly, "an' the sooner you get about your letter-



writin' the better, for it will take a good many words to put the thing down so she'll understand it. Tell her you're on board the United States schooner *Enterprise*, Lieutenant John Shaw commandin', an' that as soon as he can send you home in a naval vessel, he'll do it; but in the meantime you'll be took care of like you was eggs."

Ammi appeared to be confused by the advice which was thus literally showered upon him; but after a time he got the matter straightened out in his mind, and seemed to believe that the plan was a good one.

"I'll get about the letter right away, sir," he replied after a long pause, and no sooner had he spoken than Jethro toddled off to where his clothes-bag was stowed, coming back with two large sheets of paper, wafers enough to seal the correspondence of an admiral, and a bit of soft lead which would serve as pencil.

Joe Staples brought out a piece of pine board as a writing-desk, and then we left the lad alone that he might the better be able to set down in words all which had befallen him through the villany of his uncle.



## CHAPTER XV

### HOMeward BOUND

JUST a word here concerning a matter which was settled a year later than the time of which I am writing, and set down now lest it should escape my memory.

In describing the action with *Le Flambeau*, I have tried to picture it as the capture of a well-fought vessel by one much less in size and in the number of the crew, as really was the case; but lest the reader should overlook the fact that French 9's are larger guns than any we carried, and in addition to her having nearly thirty men the advantage of us she was decidedly heavier in metal, I repeat it; and the court which decided the prize claims was much impressed with such fact.

When *Le Flambeau* was condemned and sold, instead of dividing the prize money between the government and our crew, the entire proceeds were given to the men and officers of the *Enterprise*, because we were of greatly inferior force during the action.



Therefore it was that we were publicly thanked, so to speak, for having performed what has been spoken of as "the handsomest exploit of the war."

Of the time spent in merry-making at St. Kitts it is not essential to write; nor need I go into details concerning the work necessary to be done on our gallant little schooner before she was ready to attack the enemy again.

It is enough if I say that we thoroughly enjoyed ourselves in Basseterre, thanks to the guides, and afterward labored sufficiently hard to make up for the idle time.

Two days after we arrived in the harbor of St. Kitts, *L'Aigle* was sent off for the home port, carrying with her all the prisoners which had been taken, greatly to the satisfaction of Ammi and myself.

The other two prizes were condemned and in a fair way to be sold, therefore were the men looking forward with somewhat of impatience to the distribution of prize money which must soon be made.

Ammi was grown cheerful and contented, for the long letter which he wrote had been sent to his mother, and there was every reason to believe she would receive it in due time, since the master of the prize had explicit instructions to carry it to her in



person, if possible, or to forward it by post at the earliest moment after his arrival.

I believe the little fellow really had a liking for a sea life, and he questioned me until I was weary with the answering, regarding the methods employed in making a capture, which gave me to understand that he was burning with desire to take part in an action.

By Commander Shaw's orders, Ammi was rated as "boy," and therefore a member of the crew. His duties were to assist me in supplying the gunners with ammunition during an engagement; but it was stipulated by Mr. Wadsworth that he should not be called upon to stand watch.

In telling this story I have given no heed to the flight of time, thinking it could make little difference to the reader whether we took this or that prize on any certain day; therefore, in order to give an idea of the length of the voyage, I will say that it was the fourteenth day of August, in the year 1800, when the *Enterprise*, a clean ship once more, sailed out from St. Kitts with the intention of cruising in the Antigua Passage.

"Now, Ammi, you'll have the chance to take part in an action, unless it so be that all our commander's luck has deserted him," I said to my comrade as we



stood side by side, watching the little schooner while she bounded onward as if conscious that already was her name famous. "We have never yet set off without coming across an enemy, and it will be strange indeed if this cruise should prove an exception."

"Never you fear about that, Paul," Master Jethro said, having come up without our knowledge and overheard my remark. "So long as this 'ere vessel is under command of Lieutenant John Shaw, jest so long she will continue as she began."

It could readily be seen that all hands shared Jethro's opinion in this regard. One understood from the expression on the faces of the men that they were certain of taking yet more prizes, and having come to know the metal of the enemy, were but little concerned regarding the future.

Two days later we hove in sight a small sail, and ran upon her almost as if she had been anchored.

Ammi was in a fever of excitement from the moment the lookout hailed until we were come so near that it was apparent there could be no real fight, because the stranger was hardly more than a toy vessel.

She proved to be *La Pauline*, six guns and forty men. The wonder of it was that she had been fitted



out as a cruiser, for there was no probability of her being able either to run away or hold her own in event of meeting with an armed enemy, and even a merchant ship should have been able to beat her off.

It goes without saying that she struck her colors immediately we hailed, and not a gun was fired. We put four men aboard; confined the prisoners under the hatches, as had been our custom, and sent her toward St. Kitts, never expecting to set eyes on her again.

It may be well to set it down here that she did arrive safely, and after legally being condemned, was sold at a price that astonished us all.

After the capture we continued the cruise, standing to and fro with five men continuously on the lookout, and seeing nothing of the enemy during twelve long days, the monotony of which was broken only when we were so fortunate as to come across a Yankee vessel with a French prize crew on board; but in this last work there could be no great excitement.

During this time of standing off and on we recaptured four prizes; sent them on their way rejoicing, and took aboard the *Enterprise* four French crews, numbering in all thirty-one men.



I was convinced by this time that so long as I remained in the schooner, it would be my disagreeable duty to deal out provisions and water to a lot of Frenchmen who must be guarded carefully every moment of the day and night lest there should be an uprising, although now we had no reason to fear such a ghost as had once taken possession of the schooner's hold.

Ammi was a little jewel for working, ready at all times to do even more than his share of the tasks, and continually proposing that I leave to him the burden of the labor, in order that he might the better prove his thankfulness for having been rescued from those who had kidnapped him.

A right pleasant, cheery comrade was this little lad whose head was stuffed so full of learning that I envied him every day of my life. He never put himself forward to take part in any conversation, but there was not a question in the line of book-learning which the men asked that he could not answer; and before we had been at sea a week you would hear this or that old shell-back, in trying to uphold an argument, call upon Ammi for figures or statements to prove his position.

Such a general favorite did the boy become in a



short time that my nose was quite out of joint; and I venture to say that any ordinary heroism which might have been displayed by me would have passed unnoticed, because now I was rated among the men, and Ammi the only boy on board.

Well, the lad had the satisfaction, if such it could be called, of taking part in an action at sea before we were at the end of our cruise in the Antigua Passage.

It was the first day of September, just at sunrise, when one of the lookouts reported a sail off the lee bow, not more than two leagues distant.

There had been a light haze on the water which obscured everything save within a distance of half a mile or less, and when this lifted, there could be seen distinctly through the glasses a small brig, evidently armed, and standing directly toward us.

To have hauled around in order to meet her half-way might have caused alarm and thus prolonged the chase, whereas, hoping to give her the idea that the *Enterprise* was a merchant schooner, we held our course, putting over drags formed of spare sails to retard our progress, that she might the more quickly come upon us and yet not know we were trying to make a dull sailer of our little clipper.



A thick-headed set of officers the Frenchmen must have been, for they cracked on all sail thinking that in us they saw a prize which could easily be taken, and not until she was almost within range of our guns did the stupids discover they had been running down an armed vessel much their superior.

Then it was that the frog-eaters hauled off; our drags were brought inboard in a jiffy, and the little schooner, clothed in her full suit of canvas that glistened like silver in the rays of the morning sun, darted down upon the enemy as a hawk upon a chicken.

They might have been stupid, those Frenchmen, but they were not cowardly.

Although it was possible for them to see that we carried twelve guns while they, as we afterward learned, mounted but seven, and there could be no doubt as to the result of the engagement, the crew of the brig fought her gallantly.

She had a long 9 which could be used at the bow or stern, and fire was opened with this at the moment when our schooner leaped forward under the impulse given by the additional canvas.

And well aimed, too, was the shot which came aboard our lee bow, traversing three-fourths the length of the vessel, and passing through the rail, sent the



splinters flying in every direction on the quarter-deck.

I was standing by Ammi's side with the thought in my mind that if the lad should show signs of timorousness when the first gun was fired, I would make certain he had no opportunity to display his cowardice even though I was forced to lash him to a belaying-pin.

Therefore it was that my back was turned toward the quarter-deck at the time the shot came crashing inboard, and my first intimation of disaster was the shrill cry of fear which went up from men, who, when their own lives were in danger, would have been killed rather than display the least show of nervousness.

It was so strange, so unusual to hear such a sound on board our schooner where all had proven their courage, that I turned suddenly, and then saw Commander Shaw lying on deck just to starboard of the wheel, while over him bent both lieutenants.

One could see that he was not dead; but until the surgeons made an examination it was impossible to say how severely he had been wounded; and when the word was passed forward of what had occurred, the gunners waited for no orders to open fire.



While the commander of the schooner was being carried below, followed by the surgeons and the lieutenants, our crew fought out the battle, and what is more, won it ere yet the ship had been taken in charge by either of the other officers.

It was a running fight with no more than the distance of a musket-shot separating the two vessels, and each pouring in her fire as rapidly as the guns could be reloaded.

Our people sent two shots to the Frenchman's one, so frenzied were they by the thought that possibly the commander had been killed, and the helmsmen, without waiting for orders, kept the *Enterprise* alongside so that the gunners might have a fair target, luffing now and then lest they forge ahead of the enemy.

There had been no need for me to station myself by Ammi's side in order to prevent him from displaying signs of timorousness, for a lad who had spent all his life at sea, taking part in an engagement every day, could not have given less heed to the missiles which came aboard, cutting the rigging here and there, or splintering the rail and spars until the deck was strewn with fragments of wood.

He put me to shame with his coolness, speculating



upon the damage which was being done the Frenchman, and calmly taking account of our injuries, never once so much as bending a knee when the iron missiles hurtled with a shriek and a yell just above his head.

Such a lad as he should have shipped aboard some frigate, never mind in what capacity, and I would be willing to stake all the prize money I earned during the cruise, that he would rise from the lowest to the highest station in due course of time.

We had sent perhaps thirty shots aboard the enemy, and received from her somewhere about twenty in return, when her fore-topmast was shot away, bringing the little craft around where we might have raked her with every gun on the port side.

Then it was that she struck her colors; and as they came fluttering down, Mr. Wadsworth ran out of the cabin, shouting so that all might hear the good news:—

“The commander is seriously, but not dangerously wounded. He sends word that the Frenchman must be captured.”

“That has been done already, sir,” Jethro cried, pointing to the prize, and the men set up a shout which most likely the frog-eaters believed was one of



triumph because we had taken a vessel so insignificant as compared with our own size.

The first lieutenant came on deck and hailed in proper fashion, whereupon we learned that we had added to our captures the letter of marque *La Guadeloupéenne* with seven guns and forty-five men.

Save in the case of Mr. Shaw, we had sustained no injury whatsoever, except in the running rigging and our upper works.

When the prize crew was thrown on board, Mr. Wadsworth went with it to ascertain whether the men could be safely held prisoners on board, or if they must be transshipped, and to his great surprise, found there the same French general whom we had sent to Guadaloupe as a hostage for the safety of the two Yankees under sentence of death in that harbor.

This was the eighth armed Frenchman we had captured, and the number of Yankees retaken amounted to eleven.

All this work had been done in a few days more than eight months, and as we learned shortly afterward, the cruise was ended with the capture of *La Guadeloupéenne*.

Because of Mr. Shaw's wounds we put back to



St. Kitts after having taken the prisoners on board; and before arriving there, our commander was in such a condition that the surgeons declared he must not be allowed to longer bear the mental strain of sailing the cruiser.

Once we were in the harbor, inquiries were made at different points as to whether any Yankee vessels of war were on the station; and from all the information which could be obtained, it appeared that we were the only representative of the United States in that vicinity.

The two lieutenants, acting under the advice of the surgeons, decided that the most prudent course was to send Mr. Shaw home in one of the prizes, with the request to the government that a commander for the *Enterprise* be appointed at once, and in the meanwhile the schooner would remain in port.

Now all of our men had shipped for the cruise, and it can well be fancied that the sea-lawyers on the gun-deck set their tongues wagging as to whether any of us could rightfully be called upon to remain after a change of commanders had been made.

They argued that the cruise ended when Mr. Shaw left the vessel, and there was so much speechifying and so many noisy controversies that the condition



of affairs came to the ears of the lieutenants, who evidently held a consultation with the commander.

Then it was that Mr. Wadsworth called us aft and stated that, in the opinion of the commander, the cruise was interrupted rather than ended; but if it so chanced there were any who claimed the right to be discharged from service, they might go home in the prize.

I had thought, after hearing so much jawing, that every man jack of them would insist on his discharge; but all hands of them knew full well that such another successful cruise had never been made, and when we were brought to the test, not a man took advantage of the offer, all being eager to return to the home port on board the vessel which had won such an enviable name for herself.

As a matter of fact, those who were detailed as the prize crew grumbled because of being sent away, when, as the only vessel on the station, the *Enterprise* might be needed in some sudden emergency, and the lieutenants were forced to threaten with punishment those who rebelled against the draft.

Probably because of the fact that Commander Shaw would be on board, a larger crew than usual was given in charge of the little *La Guadaloupéenne*; and



to my great surprise and disappointment, I heard the names of Paul Burton and Ammi Merrill read among those who would attempt to carry the prize into a home port.

"Don't be downhearted, lad," Master Jethro said to me, observing my grief. "You may take my word for it that the rest of us won't be far behind you, now we've lost Mr. Shaw; an' before many months slip by we'll be shipmates on a bigger craft."

"But I'd rather stay in the *Enterprise*," I wailed; and Joe Staples said soothingly: —

"The vessel herself ain't of so much account; it's the commander what pushes her in advance, an' you can make up your mind that Lieutenant Shaw won't be allowed to remain on shore many months. We've only to keep our weather eyes liftin', in order to ship under his command soon again; for you may take my word that his wound ain't goin' to cut any very great figger."

We set sail the next day, because owing to Mr. Shaw's condition it was thought necessary to get him to the United States as quickly as possible; and once having left the *Enterprise*, it is time to bring my story to a close, since the only purpose in



beginning it was to tell of the cruise of the schooner, — that most remarkable piece of seamanship.

Let me set down here, however, the service done by the *Enterprise* while she remained on the Leeward Island station.

Lieutenant Sterrett was sent out to take command of the schooner, and he remained in her until the war with France had come to an end; but it seemed as if the luck of the *Enterprise* had deserted her when Mr. Shaw left, for she took but one prize after our departure — the schooner *L'Amour de la Patrie*, six guns and seventy-two men.

We met with no mishap on the homeward voyage; but had favoring winds from the hour we got under way until arriving in Boston harbor, and Mr. Shaw improved in health every day. It really seemed as if the relief from command aided in the healing of his wound; and save for a slight limp when he walked, no one would have fancied he had been disabled.

That he remembered Ammi was shown immediately our vessel cast anchor in Boston harbor, for then it was he announced his intention of going with the lad to his home, and to my great delight and surprise, proposed that I make one of the party.



"You two have been such firm friends that it seems almost necessary you should be in company when Ammi's cruise comes to an end in his mother's arms," he said to me.

And I went ashore with them, as can readily be fancied, for I was burning with a most intense desire to know what the lad's uncle had said or done when the letter telling of his villany arrived.

Ammi had not boasted of his mother's wealth as many another lad would have done, therefore I was surprised, and Mr. Shaw looked a trifle astonished, when he led us to one of the finest mansions in Boston, and announced his arrival by a thundering clang of the huge brass knocker.

Perhaps it will be as well if I do not attempt to describe the scene which followed our entrance, for certain it is I could not come within half a cable's length of picturing it truthfully.

Mrs. Merrill held the lad in her arms a full half hour, as if afraid that even now he might be taken from her, and only when the servants gathered around to welcome him did she release her hold.

A long time elapsed before the good woman was sufficiently calm to hear the story of her son's misadventures, and then Commander Shaw had quietly



taken his departure, after whispering to me that I might call upon him when I had visited my dear ones in Salem.

Ammi told of all that had happened from the hour his uncle enticed him on board the *Red Cloud*, and in so doing made very much of my friendship. A stranger would have thought that I was the one particular person who had done anything toward restoring him to his home; and I would have left the room for very shame, but that the lad and his mother held me tightly by the hands all the while.

I shall not set down here all Mrs. Merrill said to me on that day; but before I left, it was fully decided that Ammi and I were to remain close comrades. I was to come to Boston as soon as possible after having visited my home, and there gain such an education as would fit me for holding a commission in the navy, in case I was ever so fortunate as to win one.

It was as if Ammi had suddenly become my brother; and his mother declared again and again that we lads should share, and share alike, in all which she possessed.

At some future time I hope to be able to set down that which was done for me by the dear lad and his mother, and what it led to in the fashioning of my life.



There is little to be told regarding Ammi's uncle, who had, beyond question, plotted the boy's death.

Immediately after Mrs. Merrill received the letter from her son which had been sent home by the prize, she consulted a lawyer, and the result was that the legal gentleman soon discovered Ira Merrill's villainy in more places than one. It appeared that he had been regularly swindling the widow, and would have done even worse, once the death of the lad was compassed.

Before matters were in readiness to give the scoundrel a dose of the law, he disappeared; and when we arrived in port, steps had been taken to recover from the villain's estate such property as he had wrongfully become possessed of while settling his brother's business affairs.

It can well be supposed that I lost no time, once I was given liberty after returning to the schooner from Ammi's home, in setting out for Salem; and of the welcome I met with there from my loved ones, and in fact from every man, woman, and child I had ever seen before, need not be written down here because it is really no part of the story I undertook to tell.

Perhaps it may be well, however, if I bring to a close all that portion of the tale which concerns



Miles Partlett, although I was happy in never meeting the cowardly fellow again.

The cartel in which he had been sent home arrived finally in the port of Boston, after twice narrowly escaping capture, and Miles was sent to jail for safe keeping until the day when he was tried for treason, and for deserting his colors during an engagement.

There was considerable delay in making ready for the law business, and during such time Jethro Leighton and Joe Staples arrived at Salem, having been discharged from service because the cruise of the *Enterprise* had come to an end.

These two old sailors, together with several other members of the schooner's crew, were summoned as witnesses, and from Master Jethro I learned the result within four and twenty hours after the close of the trial.

It had been the general belief that the lad would surely be hanged; but, instead, he was let off with a sentence of two years in the common jail at Boston, and it was said that such leniency was shown because of the influence of his father's friends, who were in some way connected with the government.

According to my ideas the lad's punishment was heavy enough, even though he might really have



been called a murderer. To be shut up in jail two years must be terrible, and yet light in comparison with the fact that, when he was set at liberty, people would point him out as the boy who was a traitor to his country and his shipmates. The scorn and contempt which would ever follow him must have far outweighed the horror of being a prisoner.

From the day I parted with him at St. Kitts I never saw Miles Partlett again, nor have I heard anything to a certainty regarding him. It was whispered in Salem that when his term in prison had come to an end, he went out on the frontier with the idea of hiding himself; but I do not give credit to such a story, because the lad would not willingly put himself in the way of so much danger as is to be found where brave men are battling day after day to extend the boundary of the United States.

I am more inclined to believe with Jethro and Joe Staples, that Miles shipped on board a merchantman, using an assumed name, and it is possible that even at this day he is cruising around the world, his greatest fear being that some one may discover his true name and character. I hope, for his own peace of mind, that he may never meet with any person who ever knew him in the past.



The only boon a traitor can hope for, is that those whom he loved may never see his face again.

I wish it were possible to set down in words the love which is in my heart for Jethro Leighton and Joe Staples, now that my poor yarn has come to an end. If I have failed thus far in showing their exceeding friendliness toward the lad whom they "made over" from a very green hand into a fairly good sailor, then it is useless to attempt it now.

Since the hour when my cruise in the *Enterprise* came to an end, I have been with them during many, many long watches on shipboard, and am now doing what I may toward brightening their declining days; for both the old barnacles are anchored here in Salem, counting on meeting ashore the white-winged messenger of death, when he comes to summon them for the final voyage.

At some time in the future, if it so please those who have read this poor apology for a story, I propose to set down a detailed account of that cruise which Ammi and I made in company, when we fairly earned our commissions as midshipmen, during the war of 1812.

That we had a long and varied experience with more of danger than of pleasure in it, I am free to



admit; but while we look back to it with pride, we understand full well that neither he, nor I, nor any other ever sailed on as successful and satisfactory a cruise as that of the little *Enterprise* at the Leeward Island station.



















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